

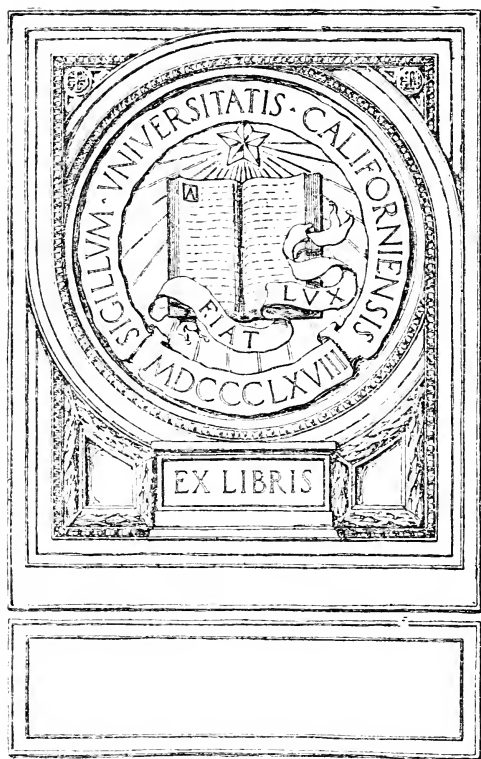
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*THE SINGING
CARAVAN
A Sufi Tale*

ROBERT VANSITTART



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THE SINGING CARAVAN

A SUFI TALE

BY

ROBERT VANSITTART

Each man is many as a caravan ;

His straggling selves collect in tales like these.

Only the love of one can make him one.

Who takes the Sufi Way—the Way of Peace ?

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

1919

Printed in Great Britain

IN MEMORIAM
MY BROTHER ARNOLD

2ND LIEUTENANT, 11TH HUSSARS

KILLED IN ACTION NEAR YPRES

MAY 1915

*In twenty years of lands and seas and cities
I had small joy and sought for it the more,
Thinking : " If ever I am πολύμητις,
'Tis yours to draw upon the hard-won store."*

*I had some bouts from Samarkand to Paris,
And took some falls 'twixt Sweden and Sudan.
If I was slow and patient learning parries,
I hoped to teach you when you were a man.*

*I cannot fall to whining round the threshold
Where Death awaited you. I lack the skill
Of hands for ever working out a fresh hold
On life. In mystic ways I serve you still.*

*The age of miracles is not yet ended.
As on the humble feast of Galilee
Surely a touch of heaven has descended
On the cheap earthen vessel, even on me,*

*Whose weak content—the soul I travail under—
Unstable as water, to myself untrue,
God's mercy makes an everlasting wonder,
Stronger than life or death, my love of you.*

I AM indebted to Mr. Arthur Humphreys, Mr. John Murray, and the Editor of the *Spectator* for kind permission to reproduce a few of the shorter poems in this tale of Persian mystics. I have included them, firstly, because I wished otherwise new work, being a memorial, to include such fragments of the past as might be worth preserving ; secondly, because decreasing leisure inspires a diffidence in the future that may justify me in asking a reader or a friend to judge or remember me only by “ Foolery ” and
“ The Singing Caravan.”

R. V.

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8

PRELUDE

THE sun smote Elburz like a gong.
Slow down the mountain's molten face
Zigzagged the caravan of song.
Time was its slave and went its pace.

It bore a white Transcaspian Queen
Whose barque had touched at Enzeli.
Splendid in jewelled palanquin
She cleft Iran from sea to sea,

Bound for the Persian Gulf of Pearls,
Where demons sail for drifting isles
With bodyguards of dancing girls
And four tamed winds for music, smiles

For passports. Thus the caravan,
Singing from chief to *charvadar*,
Reached the great gate of screened Tehran.
The burrows of the dim bazaar

Swarmed thick to see the vision pass
On brodered camels like a fleet
Of swaying silence. One there was
Who joined the strangers in the street.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Prelude

They called him Dreamer-of-the-Age,
The least of Allah's *Muslimkeen*
Who knew the joys of pilgrimage
And wore the sign of sacred green,

A poet, poor and wistful-eyed.
Him all the beauty and the song
Drew by swift magic to her side,
And in a trance he went along

Past friends who questioned of his goal :
"The Brazen Cliffs ? The Realms of Musk ?
Goes he to Mecca for his soul ? . . ."
The town-light dwindled in the dusk

Behind. Ahead Misr ? El Katif ?
The moon far up a brine-green sky
Made Demavend a huge pale reef
Set in an ocean long gone dry.

Bleached mosques like dwarf cave-stalagmites,
Smooth silver-bouldered *biyaban*
And sevenfold velvet of white nights
Vied with the singing caravan

To make her pathway plain.

Then one
Beside the poet murmured low :
"I plod behind, sun after sun,
O master, whither do we go ?

PRELUDE

Prelude

“ Are we for some palmed port of Fars,
Or tombed Kerbela, or Baghdad
The Town-of-Knowledge-of-the-Stars ?
Is worship wise or are we mad ? ”

Answered the poet : “ Do we ask
Allah to buy each Friday's throng ?
None to whom worship is a task
Should join the caravan of song.

“ With heart and eyes unquestioning, friend,
We follow love from sea to sea,
And Love and Prayer have common end :
‘ May God be merciful to me ! ’ ”

So fared they, camped from noon to even,
Till dawn, quick-groping through the gloom,
Pounced on gilt planets low in heaven.
Thus they beheld the domes of Kum.

And onward nightly. Though the dust
Swirled in dread shapes of desert *Jinn*,
Ever the footsore poet's trust
Soared to the jewelled palanquin,

Parched, but still singing : “ God, being great,
Lent me a star from sea to sea,
The drop in his hand-hollow, Fate.
He holds it high, and signs to me

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Prelude

“ Although She—She may not . . .”

“ For thirst

My songs and dreams like mirage fail.
Yea, mad ”—his fellow pilgrim cursed—
“ I was. The Queen lifts not her veil.”

“ Put no conditions to her glance,
O happy desert, where the guide
Is Love’s own self, Life’s only chance . . .”
He saw not where the other died,

But pressed on strongly, loth to halt
At Persia’s pride, Rose-Ispahan,
Whose hawks are bathed in pure cobalt.
To meet the singing caravan

Came henna-bearded prince and sage
With henna-fingered *houris*, who
Strove to retard the pilgrimage,
Saying : “ Our streets are fair and you

“ A poet. Sing of us instead.
God may be good, but life is short.
Yon are the mountains of the dead.
Here are clean robes to wear at court.”

He said : “ I seek a bliss beyond
The range of your *muezzin*-call.
Do birds cease song till heaven respond ?
The road is naught. The Hope is all.”

PRELUDE

Prelude

“ You know not this Transcaspian Queen,
Or what the journey’s end may be.
Fool among Allah’s *Musliméen*,
You chase a myth from sea to sea.”

“ Because I bargain not nor guess
If Waste or Garden wait for me,
Love gives me inner loveliness.
I hold to her from sea to sea.”

So he was gone, nor seemed to care
For beckoning shade, or boasting brook,
Or human alabaster-ware
Flaunted before him in the *suk*,

Nor paused at sunburnt far Shiraz,
The home of sinful yellow wine,
Where morning mists, like violet gauze,
Deck the bare hills, and blossoms twine

In seething coloured foam around
The lighthouse minarets.

And sheer—
A thin cascade bereft of sound—
The track falls down to dank Bushír.

The caravan slipped to the plain.
Its song rose through the rising damp,
Till, through the grey stockade of rain,
The Gulf of Pearls shone like a lamp.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Prelude

Here waiting rode a giant *dhow*,
Each hand a captive *Roumi* lord,
Who rose despite his chains to bow
As straight her beauty went aboard,

Sailed. For the Tableland of Rhyme ?
The Crystal Archipelago ?
Who knows ! This happened on a time
Among the times of long ago.

He only, Dreamer-of-the-Age,
Was left alone upon the sands,
The goal of his long pilgrimage,
The soil of all the promised lands,

Watching the *dhow* cut like a sword
The leaden waves. Yet, ere she sailed,
God poured on broken eyes reward
Out of Heaven's heart.

The Queen unveiled.

There for a space fulfilment shone,
While worship had his soul for priest
And altar. Then the light was gone,
And on the sea the singing ceased.

.

And is this all my story ? Yes,
Save that the *Sufi's* dream is true.
Dearest, in its deep lowliness
This tale is told of me and you.

PRELUDE

O love of mine, while I have breath,
 Whatever my last fate shall be,
I seek you, you alone, till death
 With all my life—from sea to sea.
And God be merciful to me.

Prelude

THE VIEW OF THE WATCHMEN

THE pilgrims from the north
 Beat on the southern gate
 All eager to set forth,
 In little mood to wait
 While watchman Abdelal
 Expounded the Koran
 To that wise seneschal,
 His mate, Ghaffir Sultan.

At length Ghaffir : “ Enough ! ”
 Even watchmen’s heads may nod.
 “ Asrâil is not rough
 If we have faith in God.”
 His fellow tapped the book :
 The *Darawish* discuss
 The point you overlook :
 Has Allah faith in us ?

Know, then, that Allah, fresh
 And splendid as a boy
 Who thinks no ill of flesh,
 Had one desire : a toy.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The View
of the
Watchmen*

And so he took for site
To build his perfect plan
The Earth, where His delight
Was manufactured : Man.

Ah, had we ever seen
The draft, our Maker's spit,
I think we must have been
Drawn to live up to it.
God was so pure and kind
He showed Shaitan the lease
Of earth that He had signed
For us, His masterpiece.

The pilgrims cried : " You flout
Our calm. Beware. It flags.
Unbar and let us out,
Sons of a thousand rags."
And Abdelal said : " Hark !
Methought I heard a din."
Said Ghaffir : " After dark
I let no devils in.

" Proceed." He sucked his pipe :
God in His happiest mood
Laid down our prototype,
And saw that man was good.
Aglow with generous pride :
" Shaitan the son of Jann,
This is my crown," He cried.
" Bow down and worship man."

THE VIEW OF THE WATCHMEN

*The View
of the
Watchmen*

Said Evil with a smirk—
He was too sly to hiss—
“ I cannot praise your work.
I could have bettered this.”
God said : “ I could have sown
The soil my puppet delves,
Yet rather gave my own
Power to perfect themselves.”

Still the fiend stiffened. “ I
Bow not.” Our prophet saith
That he would not comply
Because he had no faith
In us. He only saw
The worst of Allah’s toy,
The springs, some surface flaw,
The strengthening alloy.

Said God : “ The faults are mine.
I gave him hope and doubt,
The mind that my design
Shall have to work Me out.
What though he fall ! Is love
So faint that I should grieve ?
How else, friend, should I prove
To him that I believe ?

“ And how else should he rise ?
Lo, I, that made the night,
Have given his conscience eyes
Therein to find the Right.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The View
of the
Watchmen*

I have stretched out his hand,
Oh, not to grasp but feel,
Have taught his aims to land,
But tipped the aims with steel ;

“ Have given him iron resolve
And one great master-key,
Courage, to bid revolve
The hinge of destiny,
And beams from heaven to build
The road to Otherwise,
With broken gloom to gild
The causeway of his sighs

“ Whereby I watch him come
At last to judge of Me,
Beyond the thunder’s drum,
The cymbals of the sea.
Aye, Shaitan, plumb the Space
And Time that planets buoy,
And you shall know the place
Appointed for my toy.

“ I could not give him rest,
And see him satiate
At once, or make the zest
Of life an opiate.
I might have been his lord,
I had not been his friend

THE VIEW OF THE WATCHMEN

To sheathe his spirit's sword
And start him at the end.

*The View
of the
Watchmen*

“ I would not make him old,
That he might see his port
Fling its nocturne of gold
And cheerfulness athwart
The dusk. I planned the wave,
And wealth of wind and star.
Could one be gay and brave
Who never saw afar

“ The cause that he outlives
Only because he fought,
The peaks to which he strives,
The ranges of his thought,
Until the dawn to be
Relieve his watchfires dim,
Not by his faith in Me
But by my faith in him !

“ I also have my dreams,
And through my darkest cloud
His climbing phalanx gleams
To my salute, and, proud
Of him even in defeat,
My light upon his brow,
My roughness at his feet,
I triumph. Shaitan, bow ! ”

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The View
of the
Watchmen*

But Shaitan like an ass
Jibbed and would not give ear.
Just so it came to pass,
Declares our Book, Ghaffír.
We know that in the heat
Of disputation—well,
Allah shot out his feet,
And Shaitan went to hell.

Thus Abdelal. The gate
Shook to the pilgrims' cry :
“ When will you cease to prate,
Beards of calamity ! ”
The poet : “ Allah's bliss
Fall on his watchmen ! Thus
Our journey's password is
That God has faith in us.”

II

THE JOY OF THE WORDS

THE Sufis trembled : “ Open, open wide,
Dismiss us to illuminate the East.”
Old Ghaffir fumbled the reluctant bolts,
Lifting his hands and eyes as for a feast.
And this was their viaticum. His words
Were mingled with their eagerness like yeast :

Go forth, poor words !
If truly you are free,
Simple, direct, you shall be winged like birds,
Voiced like the sea.

Walk humbly clad !
Be sure those words are lame
That ride a-clatter, or that deck and pad
A puny frame.

As in your dress,
So in your speech be plain !
Be not deceived ; the Mighty Meaningless
Are loud in vain.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Joy of
the Words*

Be not puffed up,
Nor drunk with your own sound !
Shall men drink deeply when an empty cup
Is handed round ?

Shout not at heaven !
Say what I bade you say.
Simplicity is beauty dwelling even
In yea or nay.

Be this your goal.
Beauty within man's reach
Is poetry. You cannot touch man's soul
Save with man's speech.

Therefore go straight.
You shall not turn aside
To vain display ; for yonder lies the gate
Where gods abide

Your coming. Go !
The way was never hard.
What would you more than common flowers
For your reward, [or snow ?

Be understood,
And thus shall you be sung.
Aye, you who think to show us any good,
Speak in our tongue.

III

THE DEPTH OF THE NIGHT

THE watchman finished, as the southern gate
Clanged, and the breathless city lay behind.
The Dreamer's shadows shrank against the
wall,

As though the desert called and none replied,
Till the young pilot, standing out to night,
Swung clear these lines to sound the depths of her :

“ Blue Persian night,
Soft, voiceless as the summer sea !
Flooding the bouldered desert sand, submerge
This cypressed isle
And Demavend's snow-spire—a sunken rock
On your hushed floor, where I the diver stand
Beyond the reach of day.
And though, up through your overwhelming peace,
I see your surface, heaven,
I would not rise there, being drowned in you,
Blue Persian night.

“ Blue Persian night,
O consolation of the East !
In your clear breathless oceanic sheen
My heart 's an isle,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Depth
of the
Night*

From whose innumerable caves and coigns—
When dusk awakes the city of my mind—
Exploring boats set forth,
Bound for the harbour-lights of God knows where,
Full, full of God knows what ;
It must be love of Him, or Her, or You,
Blue Persian night.”

Her signal answered ; for a slender wand
Of moonbeam touched the Dreamer on the mouth.
The caravan looked upward with a shout
And set its camels rolling to the south,
Murmuring : “ Blue Persian night, none ever saw
You through your own sheer purity before us.
Rise up our songs as bubbles from the sand . . . ”
Somewhere among the camels rose this chorus :

Dong ! Dong !
Lurching along
Out of the dusk
Into the night.
Noiseless and lusty,
Dreamy and dusty,
Looms the long caravan-line into sight.

Dong ! Dong !
Never a song,
Never a footfall
A breath or a sigh.

THE DEPTH OF THE NIGHT

Ghostly and stolid,
Stately and squalid,
Creeps the monotonous caravan by.

*The Depth
of the
Night*

Dong ! Dong !
Fugitive throng.
Out of the dark
Into the night,
Silent and lonely,
Gone ! . . . the bells only
Tells us a caravan once was in sight.

IV

THE INWARDNESS OF THE
MERCHANT

MOUSSA, the son of the Crypto-Jew,
Had eaten his fill of yellow stew

And a bit besides (as a business man
He was far too quick for the caravan,

Who loved him not, though it feared his guile).
Moussa then : " I shall walk awhile

" To ease my soul of its heavy load."
His pious friends : " May you find a road,"

And winked. " His soul has begun to feel
There's nothing left but a march to steal."

But one from the village, decoying quail
For the governor's pot, came back with a tale

Of a lean arm shaken against the sky
Like a stunted thorn, and this piteous cry :

" As sound within an ice-bound desert mewed
Drags out existence at the very core

THE INWARDNESS OF THE MERCHANT

Of isolation, as breakers slip ashore
In vainly eternal whispers to the nude
Reef-coral, where no human feet intrude
Upon the purity of stillness ; or
As, far from life, unmated eagles soar
Above the hilltops' breathless solitude,

*The In-
wardness
of the
Merchant*

“ So moves my love, like these a thing apart,
Fierce, in the ruined temple of my heart,
Shy as a shooting star that peers new-risen
Mid strangers. Even so. Pent in the prison
Of space my soul, a lonely planet, wheels . . .
Men call the sum of loneliness ‘ Ideals.’ ”

This is the plaint that the cross-road heard
Where it strikes from Kashan to Burujird.

The townsmen, met by the sun-dried stream,
Caught a voice high up like an angel's scream

Or a teaspoon tapping the bowl of heaven,
And they cried : “ *Ajab !* May we be forgiven,

“ But it sounds a soul of the rarer sort
Whose wings are set for no earthly port.”

And the answer came, as they cried : “ Who's that ? ”
“ One that sells short weight in mutton fat.”

THE LESSON OF THE CAMEL

LIGHT was not. All was still. The caravan
 Had ceased its song and motion by the bed
 Wherein the hill-stream tosses sleeplessly,
 The only sound, save one staccato note
 Interminably piped by tiny owls.
 The camp lay balmed in slumber, as the dead
 Are straitened in white trappings. Then a voice,
 Deeper than any dead black mountain pool
 Or blacker well where devils cool by day,
 Seemed to commune with Dreamer-of-the-Age,
 Who, peering through the cloak about his head,
 Challenged : " Who speaks ? " The voice replied :
 " A friend
 Unknown to you." . . . It was old Peacock Tous,
 The great grey camel with the crimson tail
 On whom the queen was wont to ride.

He said :

" Sheikh, I was born among the Bakhtiari,
 The shelter of their hawthorn vales was mine ;
 For me, unbroken to the loads men carry,
 The breeze that crowns their uplands glowed as
 wine

THE LESSON OF THE CAMEL

To drink. I, Tous, the Peacock, whom men call so *The Lesson*
Because I ever moved as one above *of the*
The common herd, was mad and merry. Also *Camel*
I knew not yet the prickled herb of Love.

“Spring tricked the desert out with flowered
patterns

For me to tread like flowered carpets wrought
In patience by my master’s painted slatterns—

He said that only Persian *women* fought.
Ah, youth is free and silken-haired and leggy !

No camel knows why Allah makes it end,
But He is wiser. Me the tribe’s Il-Beggi
Spied out and sent as tribute to a friend,

“A dweller in black tents, a nomad chieftain
Of Khamseh Arabs or unruled Kashgai,
Whose cattle-raids and rapines past belief stain
The furthest page of camel-history.

And shamefully the ragged sutlers thwacked us,
Until I learned, as to this manner born,
That pride must find a mother in the cactus
And hope the milk of kindness in the thorn.

“O Sheikh, I found. A milk-white *nakeh* followed
The drove of males, and I would lag behind
With her, no matter how the drivers holloa’ed—
Man never doubts that all but he are blind.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Lesson
of the
Camel*

At nightfall, when our champing echoed surly
Beyond the cheerful circle of the fire,
Something within me whispered, and thus early
I bore the burden of the world's desire.

“ But I was saddled with the will of Allah,
Since one there was more fleet of foot than I,
The chosen of the chief of the Mehallah,
Whose nostrils quivered as he passed me by.
To her, beside his paces and his frothing,
My steadfastness was common as the air,
My passion and my patience were as nothing,
Because fate chose to make my rival fair.

“ I suffered and was silent—some said lazy—
Until the seasons drove us to the plain.
The nomads sold me then to a Shirazi.
I never met my happiness again,
But trod the same old measure back and forward,
And passed a friend as seldom as a tree.
Oh, heaviness of ever going shoreward,
Of bringing all fruition to the sea !

“ For I have fared from sea to sea like you, sirs,
And with your like, not once but many times.
Your path acclaims me eldest of its users,
It tells my step as I foresee your rhymes.
I know by heart a heartache's thousandth chapter
As you have read the preface of delight.
The silence you shall enter, I have mapped her.
O singing caravan, I was To-night

THE LESSON OF THE CAMEL

“ Long ere you dreamed. I dreaming of my lady *The Lesson
of the
Camel*
Became the cargo-bearer we call Self.

Two hundredweight of flesh that spouted Sa'di,
A restless bag of bones intent on pelf,
Have straddled me in turn . . . Hashish and
spices,

Wheat, poisons, satins, brass, and graven stone,
I, Tous, have borne all human needs and vices
As solemnly as had they been my own.

“ Moon-faced sultanas blue with kohl a-pillion,
Grey ambergris, pink damask-roses' oil,
Deep murex purple, beards or lips vermilion
As Abu Musa's flaming scarlet soil
I have borne—and dung and lacquer. I have
flooded

Bazaars with poppy-seed and filigree.
Men little guess the stuff that I have studied,
Or what their vaunted traffic seems to me.

“ I am hardened to all wonderments and stories—
My ears have borne the hardest of my task—
I have carried pearls from Lingah up to Tauris,
And Russian Jews from Lenkoran to Jask.
I have watched fat vessels crammed by sweating
coolies

With all the rubbish that the rich devise,
And often I have wondered who the fool is
That takes it all, and whom the fool supplies.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Lesson
of the
Camel*

“ Yet ran my thoughts on her, though cedar rafters
Were laid on me, or mottled silk and plush,
Although the tinkling scales of varied laughter
Rode me from Bandar Abbas to Barfrush,
Or broken hearts from Astara to Gwetter.

All ironies have made their moving house
Of me. I smile to think how many a letter
Has passed from loved to lover thanks to Tous

“ The loveless. Think you men alone are lonely,
My masters ? I have also worshipped one,
Have built my days of faith and service only,
And while I worshipped all my life was gone.
I spent the funds of life in growing older,
In heaping fuel on a smothered fire.

See how my tale is rounded ! On my shoulder
I bear the burden of *your* world's desire.

“ Yet keep that inner smile ; and never show it
Though the Account be nothing—shorn of her.
Be wise, O Sheikh. Pray God to be a poet
Lest life should make you a philosopher,
Or lest the dreams of which *you* had the making
Should prove to be such stuff as still I trail,
And bring your heart, my withers, nigh to breaking
When at the last the Bearer eyes the Bale,

“ As you shall penetrate this day or morrow
The miracle of willing servitude,
And yet believe therein. It is the sorrow
And not the love that asks to be subdued ;

THE LESSON OF THE CAMEL

It is the mirage not the truth that trammels
The travelling feet. Ah, if men only knew
How their brief frenzies move the mirth of camels,
Our rests were longer and our journeys few.

*The Lesson
of the
Camel*

“Old Tous is up. The camp is struck and ready
For fresh emprise. Dawn sifts the clay-blue sky
For gold. Now see how dominant and steady
I prose along that have no mind to fly.
This is my lesson : over sand or shingle,
Blow hot, blow cold, by mountain, plain and *khor*,
Coming and going, I must set a-jingle
My own deep bell. . . . And you must ask for
more !”

He ceased. White on the mirror of the air
His breath made patterns. In a ruined farm
Red cocks blared out and shouted down the owls.
The drivers rubbed their eyes. Another day
Among the days was starting on its march . . .
Above the pilgrims fallen to their prayers
Old Tous stood upright, blinking at the sun.

VI

THE BOASTING OF YOUTH

THE soldier-lad from Kerman,
The sailor-lad from Jask
Knew naught that should deter man
From finishing the cask.
“Wine sets the Faithful jibbing
Like mules before an inn,
But we sit bravely bibbing,
And hold our own with sin.”

Said the stout-hearted wonder
Of Jask : “Wine frights not me.
I fear no foe but thunder
And winds that sting the sea.”
“And I,” said he of Kerman,
“Fear nothing but the night,
Or some imperious *firman*
That bids the Faithful fight.”

“They say some lads fear ladies
And truckle to them.” “Who
Could be so weak ? The *Cadis*
Rise up for me and you.”

THE BOASTING OF YOUTH

*The
Boasting of
Youth*

“ But doctors, nay and princes,
Have troubles of their own,
Save those whom fire convinces . . .
I leave the stuff alone.”

“ And I . . .” Then both bethought them
That, howso strong and wise,
Their principles had caught them
On this mad enterprise.

“ ’Tis time to act with daring,
And rest,” said he of Jask,
And swore a mighty swearing,
(And drained another flask).

“ If I go on, attendant
Upon this woman’s way,
May I become dependant
On your arrears of pay ! ”

“ If I,” said Captain Kerman,
“ Should knuckle to my mate,
May I become a merman
And live on maggot-bait ! ”

“ Then since we have discovered
That women need our strength ”—
(The tavern-houris hovered)

“ To hold them at arm’s length,
Sit down in this rest-house, and
Tell me a tale among
The tales, one in your thousand ! ”
This was the story sung :

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Boasting of
Youth*

“ I threw my love about you like fine raiment ;
I let you kill my pride.
You passed me by, but smiled at me in payment,
And I was satisfied.

“ I made my mind a plaything for your leisure,
Content to be ignored.
Body and soul I waited on your pleasure,
Waited—without reward.

“ I have no faint repinings that we met, dear,
Or that I left you cold.
I rub my hands. You will be colder yet, dear,
Some day when you are old.”

“ Forbidden wine is mellow.
The sun has set. Of whom
Sing you this song, Brave Fellow ?
Night is the ante-room
Breeze-sprinkled to keep cooler
The feasting-halls behind.”

“ She might have been my ruler
But for my *Strength of Mind*.”

“ That was the tune to whistle !
How have I longed to learn
The deeds of men of gristle
Like mine ! . . . ” “ Tell me in turn
Some of your lore of women,
Whose wiles are deep as *bhang*.

THE BOASTING OF YOUTH

Your strength shall teach to swim men
Who fall in love. . . .” He sang :

*The
Boasting of
Youth*

“ You came to me, and well you chose your quarry.
You told your tale, and well you played your rôle.
You spoke of suffering, and I was sorry

With all my heart, with all my soul.

‘ Out of the deep,’ you said. I thought to save you,
And stunned myself upon the covered shoal.

Yet, poor deceptive shallows, I forgave you

With all my heart, with all my soul.

You sought whatever evil had not sought you.

In vain I strove to make your nature whole.

I did not know the market that had bought you

With all your heart, with all your soul.

If man had one pure impulse you would smudge it.

You had one gift, my pity, which you stole.

Now I will only tell you that I grudge it

With all my heart, with all my soul.”

“ Of whom this song, Brave Fellow ?

The stars in heaven’s black soil

Fold up their petalled yellow

That pays the angels’ toil.”

The lamp had burned its wick dim,

The pair had drunk their fill . . .

“ I might have been her victim

But for my *Strength of Will*.”

Then one said to the other :

“ Such strength as yours and mine

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Boasting of
Youth*

Must put its foot down, brother,
And stay here—pass the wine—
Till, for the world's salvation,
Shall radiate from this den
The Great Confederation
Of Independent Men.”

.

The last sour mule was saddled,
On went the caravan.
These twain turned on the raddled
Handmaidens of the *han*,
Blinked, cast them forth with loathing
Because the queen was fair,
And lest their lack of clothing
Should lay man's weakness bare.

White as a cloud in summer,
Slender as sun-shot rain—
Earth knows what moods become her—
The queen passed . . .

In her train

The Great Confederation
Trode with such wealth of *Will*
That, in its trepidation,
It never paid its bill.

VII

THE HEART OF THE SLAVE

BUT as they fared slave Obeidullah failed.
Devouring fever shook him like a rat,
And ere they reached Kashan his course was
run.

Then freedom came towards him, and he spoke :
“ Here is an eye of water, mulberry-trees,
A rest-house, and to me a stranger thing,
Rest. Caravan be strong, fare on with blessings
Whence you must forge your happiness—but I,
Possessed of peace, shall never see the end.
The heart within me has been fire so long
That now my body is smoke. I watch it drift
Life leaves me gently as a mistress goes
Before her time to meet the uncoloured days,
Saying : ‘ I have lived. Plead not. ’Twill be in vain.
You were the end of summer. I have passed
Out of the garden with fresh scents and dews
Upon me, out ere sunset with cool hands,
The supple tread of youth and glorying limbs
Firm as resolve, unblemished as my pride ;
Passed ere a leaf be fallen, or losing fights
Begin, that smirch the memory of love. . . .’
Sweet is the shade, and death’s cool lips are welcome
After the burning kisses of the sun,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The Heart The strained embraces of my owner, Toil.
of the Slave I shall remember her with gratitude
But no regret, as I lie here. The dawn
Biting the desert-edge shall not disturb me,
Nor green oases zigzagged through the heat
Like stepping-stones. The many-coloured hills,
Heaven's mutable emotions, these are past.
Beyond them I shall find security
Of tenure in the outstretched hands of God."
Thereat his fellows made lament, and urged :
"Sleep on and take your rest, but not for ever.
Time adds to strength, and you shall rise with us
Who wait. Already we foresee the coast.
A little while . . ." Slave Obeidullah raised
Himself and looked ahead with shining eyes :

"The moon is faint. A dust-cloud swirls.
Therein I see dim marching hosts :
Strange embassies and dancing girls,
Spice-caravans and pilgrims. Ghosts
Rise thick from this else fruitless plain,
A waste that every season chars.
Yet teeming centuries lie slain
And trodden in the road to Fars.

"The still, white, creeping road slips on,
Marked by the bones of man and beast.
What comeliness and might have gone
To pad the highway of the East !

THE HEART OF THE SLAVE

*The Heart
of the Slave*

Long dynasties of fallen rose,
The glories of a thousand wars,
A million lovers' hearts compose
The dust upon the road to Fars.

“ No tears have ever served to hold
This shifting velvet, fathom-deep,
Though vain and ceaseless winds have rolled
Its pile wherein the ages sleep.
Between your fingers you may sift
Kings, poets, priests and *charvadars*.
Heaven knows how many make a drift
Of dust upon the road to Fars.

The wraiths subside. And, One with All,
Soon, in the brevity of length,
Our lives shall hear the voiceless call
That builds this earth of love and strength.
Eternal, breathless, we shall wait,
Till, last of all the Avatars,
God finds us in his first estate :
The dust upon the road to Fars.”

So still he lay, so still the pilgrims deemed
He was no longer there. The deepening shade
Covered him softly. With his latest breath
Slave Obeidullah looked upon the Queen :

“ You whom I loved so steadfastly,
If all the blest should ask to see

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Heart
of the Slave*

The cause for which my spirit came
Among them with so little claim
To peace, this book should speak for me.

“ I strove and only asked in fee
Hope of your immortality
Not mine—I had no other aim
You whom I loved.

“ The Judge will bend to hear my plea,
And take my songs upon his knee.
Perhaps His hand will make the lame
Worthy to worship you, the same
As here they vainly tried to be,
You whom I loved.”

Then, turned towards her, Obeidullah slept.

VIII

THE TALE OF THE CHEAPJACK

AMONG the fruit-trees still he slumbers. All
Mourned for their brother with one heavy
heart.

Even Tous drooped, swaying weakly in his stride ;
Until Farid Bahadur, cheapjack, spoke,
One bootlessly afoot whose years had brought
For profit this, to see existence clear
And empty as a solid ball of glass.

Erstwhile, he said, my peddling carried me
Clean through two empires like a paper hoop,
Setting me down upon the olive slopes
Where Smyrna nestles back to mother earth,
And so lures in the ocean. I filled my pack
With kerchiefs, beads, dross, chaffering with a Greek,
Although he vowed a much-loved partner's death
Left him no heart for it. He blew his nose,
Asking strange prices as a man distraught.
I had no heart to bargain while he crooned :

“ Our loves were woven of one splendid thread,
But not our lives, though we had been, we twain,
Linked as in worship at the Spartan fane
Of him who brought his brother from the dead.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Tale
of the
Cheapjack*

Ah, would our God were like his gods that said :
Such love as this shall not have flowered in vain,
And let the younger Castor live again
The space that Pollux lay with Death instead.
Dear, I had lain so gladly in the grave
Not for a part of time but for God's whole
Eternity, had died, yea oft, to save
Not half your life, but one short hour. Your soul
Was all too pure ; mine had no right to ask
From heaven such mercy as a saviour's task.

“ They say the Olympian grace was not content
With housing Death, but giving Love the key.
It set the troths that guided you and me
Among the jewels of the firmament ;
And there they dwell for ever and assent
To each propitious ploughing of the sea.
The coasting-pilots of Infinity
Well know The Brothers. So your sails were bent,
Young fathomer of the blue. I linger here
With following gaze that tugs my heart-strings taut
All day ; but every night an Argonaut
Slips through the streets and darkness, seaward, far
Beyond the limitations of his sphere
Into the vacant place beside a star.”

So crooned he desolate in his dim shop,
Till I became all ears and had no eyes.
The fellow cheated me of three *dinars*.

IX

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

SLOW into Kum the Glaring trailed
The caravan. Its courage failed
A moment. Only dust-clouds veiled
The sun, that overhead
From fields The Plough had turned to grain,
Star-honey laden on The Wain
And spices from the wind-domain,
Was baking angel-bread.
(Astronomers in Baghdad say
That Allah gave the Milky Way
To feed his guests, the dead.)

Even as the dead the pilgrims lay
Until the sun received his pay—
Man counts in gold, but he in grey—
Then, whining as one daft,
A voice crept to each sleeper's ear,
And one by one sat up to hear
It soughing like a Seistan mere
Where nothing ever laughed.
A blur at elbow on the floor
Cried : " Sleep ! 'Tis but the tavern door
Amoaning in the draught."

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ Ay,” said the master of the inn,
“ A black-faced gaper that lets in
The dark, my creditors, and kin !

Last month it strained my wrist, did
The lout, so hard it slams. This week
Claims it for fuel. See the leak
Of air it springs ! Its hinges creak,

Its wood is warped and twisted.
'Tis heavy-hearted as a man,
Stark, crazy thing ! . . . It feels uncann . . . ”

The wheezing voice persisted.

“ Earth bare me in Mazanderan,
Where, breaking her dead level plan,
Steep foliage opens like a fan
To hide her virgin blush ;
And singing, caravan, like you
Brooks dance towards the Caspian blue
Past coolth wherein mauve turtles coo

To panthers in the rush,
That turn hill-pools to amethyst.
Here bucks drink deep and tigers tryst
Neck-deep in grasses lush.

“ And there the stainless peaks are kissed
By heaven whose crowning mercy, mist,
With cloud-lands white as Allah's fist
Anoints their heads with rain.
We never dreamed, where nature pours,
That life could run as thin as yours—

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

A waif thirst-stricken to all fours—
Or verdure, but a vein
In sandscapes wincing from the sun
That burns your flesh and visions dun,
Crawl throbbing through the plain.

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ I grew. My shadow weighed a ton ;
I held a countless garrison ;
My boughs were roads for apes to run
Around the white owl's niche.
The hum of bees, the blue jay's scream. . . .
The forest came to love and teem
In me beside the vivid stream
Shot through with speckled fish ;
Till, weary of my sheltered glen,
I craved a human denizen
Fate granted me my wish.

“ Yea, I had longed (if slope and fen
Can love like this, the love of men
Must live above our nature's ken)
To see and shade the room,
To shield far-leaning the abode,
Wherein the souls of lovers glowed
To songs that dimmed the bulbul's ode . . .
And man became my doom.
He dragged me through the dew-drenched brake,
And took the heart of me to make
A tavern-door at Kum.”

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Experience
of the Door*

The pilgrims sat erect, engrossed,
Or searched the crannies for a ghost.
“ Ah, heed it not,” implored the host ;
 “ This hell-burnt father’s son
Moans ever like a soul oppressed,
And takes the fancy of a guest,
And makes my house no house of rest :
 I would its voice were gone.
Yet be indulgent, sirs ! ’Tis old.
Next week it shall be burnt or sold.
 A new—” The voice went on :

“ Here have I stood while life unrolled
But not the tale my breezes told.
Moonlight alone conceals the cold
 Drab city’s lack of heart.
Here have I watched an hundred years
Bespatter me with blood and tears,
Yet leave man ever in arrears
 Of where my monkeys start.
No more, dog-rose and meadow-sweet !
The harlot’s musk and rotten meat
 Blow at me from the mart.

“ No more, clear streams and fairy feet !
But through my mouth the striving street
Drains in brown spate the men who eat
 And drink and curse and die ;
And out of me the whole night long
Reel revellers—O God, their song ! . .

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

Are there no mortals clean and strong,
Or do they pass me by ?
I little thought that I should leave
For this the groves where turtles grieve
Far closer to the sky.

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ Instead of every song-bird’s note
I know the scales a merchant’s throat
Can compass. I have learned by rote
The tricks of Copt and Jew ;
Can tell if Lur or Afghan brawls,
The Armenian way of selling shawls
Softly, and how an Arab bawls
To rouse the raider’s crew,
Lest ululating strings of slaves
Should take the kennel for their graves. . . .
Raids ! I have seen a few,

“ Or wars, occasion dubs them—waves
Of Mongol sultans, Kurdish braves.
They—Find me words ! the Simûn *raves*—
They worked . . . ’tis called their will,
Battered me in—behold the dint—
With all their hearts that felt like flint,
Besmeared the city with the tint
Of sunset on my hill.
My leopards stalk my bucks at eve—
I shivered as I heard them heave—
At least they ate their kill.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ I followed that. . . . But men who weave
Such flowing robes of make-believe,
I think the flood was wept by Eve—
Some sportsman shot the dove—
These puzzled me, for God is good
And man His image—not of wood,
Thank God !—At last I understood
All . . . all except their love.
I grew so hard that I could trace
His hand’s chief glory in their race.
Perhaps He wore a glove.”

Then one without made haste to smite
The malcontent. It opened. Night
Stood on the threshold dressed in white,
And myriad-eyed and blind.
The ostler murmured : “ Some *Afrit*
Or bitter worm has entered it ;
Nor jamb nor lintel seems to fit.
I know its frame of mind.”
“ Air stirs the dust upon the floor,”
The landlord cried. “ Fool ! Shut that door
Amoaning in the wind.”

“ My glade was deep, a lichened well
Of ether, limpid as a bell
Buoyed on the manifold ground-swell
Whose distance changed attires
As sun-stroked plush, a roundelay
Of all red-blue and purple grey,

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

And, at each rise and fall of day,
 Snows dyed like altar fires
Licked through those loud green sheaves of copse,
Bent hyphens 'twixt the mountain-tops,
 Mosques of my motley choirs.

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ And I, who gave them bed and bower
For nights enduring but an hour
Mid blaring miles of trumpet-flower,
 Leagues of liana-wreath,
I saw the rocks through leaves and lings,
Could blink the fangs and feel the wings,
Thrill with the elemental things
 Of life and love and death.
The purity of air and brook
And song helped me to overlook
 The rapine underneath.

“ But you—no ! one dream more : an elf,
Askip on ochre mountain-shelf,
Who once had seen a man himself.
 I used his wand to gauge
The sheen of moths and peacocks' whirl,
To plumb the jungle-aisles, to stir
The drifts of frankincense and myrrh,
And amorous lithe shapes that purr. . . .
 'Tis finished. Turn the page
To where man cased his bones in fat.
His mate moved like a tiger-cat
 Until he built her cage.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ You, I have watched you all who sat
Successive round the food-stained mat,
And reckoned many who lived for that
Alone ; have seen the mark
Of that last state the Thinking Beast
Peep through the foliage of the feast,
And crown its poet’s flight with greased
Fingers that grope the dark ;
Have heard a cleaner bosom catch
Her breath, and fumble with my latch
Irresolute. The lark

“ My inmates never feared to match
Bespoke the end. I belched the batch,
Rolling them down the street, a patch
Of dirt against the dawn.
Then in its stead there came a saint,
Inventor of a soul-complaint,
Who gave men’s faith a coat of paint
Like mine, and made me yawn
With furtive wenching. Here have sighed
Exultant groom and weeping bride
Led like a captive fawn.

“ This way passed those who marry lean
Girl-chattels ere their times of teen.
I knew a like but milder scene :
A hawk, small birds that cower.
How soon the chosen was brought back dead—
Poisoned, the *hakim* always said—

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOOR

The husband groaned beside the bed,
Arose, and kept the dower,
But swept his conscience out with prayer.
Man took the angels unaware
When he became a power.

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ And what of woman ? On my stair
The merchants spread their gaudiest ware,
For which fools bought a love affair
That ended in a jerk.
Enough ! To round the *tamasha*
A bloated thing came by, the Shah ;
It grinned, and viziers fawned ‘ Ha ! ha ! ’
Curs, brainless as a Turk.
And all the women in his train
Beheld him once and ne’er again,
And called his love their work.

“ You see, my friends, I tired of this
Wild doubling in the chase of bliss.
Pards miss their spring as men their kiss,
And yet the quarry dies.
I learned the world’s least mortal god,
Whose epitaph is Ichabod,
May sport till noon, but if he nod
Shall never more arise.
Then, caravan, you passed, and I
Have solved my riddle with a cry :
The sad are never wise.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Experience
of the Door*

“ Your song was all that I had heard
In dreams beyond the wildest bird,
That rose above my yellow-furred
 Basses that bell and roar.
It took the heart of me in tow
To heights that I had longed to know,
To the great deeps where lovers go
 And find—and want—no shore.
In these alone is man fulfilled ;
And gleaming in the air I build
 My hope of him once more.

“ For all the few that see truth whole,
And take its endlessness for goal,
And steer by stars as if no shoal
 Could mar their firmament,
For all the few that sing and sail
Knowing their quest of small avail,
Thank God who gave them strength to fail
 In finding what He meant. . . .”
“ Poets ! ” the landlord groaned, “ and poor !
This house is cursed.” He banged the door
Behind them as they went.

And distance placed soft hands upon their mouths.

X

THE SONG OF THE SELVES

DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

'T WAS in old Tehran City,
Hard by the old bazaar,
I heard a restless ditty
That pushed my door ajar ;

A song nor great nor witty,
It spoke of my own mind.
I looked on Tehran City,
And knew I had been blind,

Or else the streets were altered
As by a peri's wand.
"Who are you, friends ?" I faltered.
"The Pilgrims of Beyond,"

They said. I kissed the tatters
That wiser heads contemn.
I saw the Thing-that-matters,
And took the road with them.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

I seek. Bestow no pity
On Failure's courtier. Say :
" 'Twas well to find the city,
But that was yesterday."

THE PILGRIMS

ATHIRST as the Hadramut,
Our spirits correspond
With God by all the gamut
Of harmony, too fond
Of Him for prayer that rifles
His treasury for trifles.
No load of blessing stifles
The Pilgrims of Beyond.

DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

AND yet the empty-handed
Hold richer merchandise
Than ever fable landed
From Dreamland's argosies,

Since we, the symbol-merchants,
Are partners with Bulbul.
The silversmith of her chants
Knows how our chests are full.

THE SONG OF THE SELVES

In marts, where echoes answer
And only they, we trade.
But join our caravan, sir,
And count your fortune made.

*The Song of
the Selves*

Dawn brings us dazzling offers
With fingers gemmed and pearled,
And evening fills our coffers
As we explain the world,

Green fields and seas that curtsey
To us and mock Despair ;
For blossoms in the dirt see
Their spirit in the air.

And Ecstasy our servant
Demands no other wage
But that we be observant
To joy in pilgrimage.

THE MERCHANTS

WE do not bid our master
Declare His word His bond,
Or make His payments faster—
As though He would abscond !
We ask Him for too little
To strain at jot or tittle.
We know our lives are brittle,
We Pilgrims of Beyond.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Song of
the Selves*

DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

WE come from everlasting
Towards eternity,
Ho ! not in dirge and fasting
But lapped in jollity.

Though sackcloth be our clothing
We bear no ash but fire.
We have no sickly loathing
Of youth and youth's desire.

We prize no consummation
Of one peculiar creed.
We travel for a nation,
The one that feels our need.

Our tongue conceals no message,
But leaves you free to find,
And vaunts itself the presage
Of those that come behind.

THE CAMELMEN

HERE is no patch of shade. A
Fierce wilderness and blonde
Links Delhi to Hodeidah,
Tashkent to Trebizond.

THE SONG OF THE SELVES

The cargo is our brother's,
We march and moil for others,
Until the desert smothers
The Pilgrims of Beyond.

*The Song of
the Selves*

DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

HARK how our camels grumble
At morn ! Would you permit
The stone on which you stumble
To make you carry it ?

And if at last your burden
Be cheapened in a shop,
Seraglio or Lur den,
Should lack of humour stop

The game at its beginning ?
We lug the stuff of dreams.
Earth does her best by spinning,
She cannot help the seams ;

But you can help to monger
The broidery. She may
Have made you richer, stronger,
To give her best away.

*The Song of
the Selves*

THE SINGING CARAVAN

I own no musk or camphor,
I have no truck with care,
Nor change the thing I am for
The things men only wear.

THE SOLDIERS

FIRST cousin of a sieve is
The uniform we donned.
We slop along on *ghivehs*,
In rags caparisonned.
No Shah has ever paid us.
All brigands mock and raid us,
And misery has made us
The Pilgrims of Beyond.

DREAMER-OF-THE-AGE

WHAT then ! Would you be willing
To quit the caravan,
And fall again to drilling,
Pent in the walled *meidan*,

When history flings open
Blank scrolls for you to write
Such victories as no pen
Has ever brought to light ?

THE SONG OF THE SELVES

You shall not burn as Jengiz,
Nor rage like Timur Lang.
Your foemen are *ferengis*
Of whom no epic sang.

*The Song of
the Selves*

The housed that blame the tented,
Or comfort those that think,
The flocks that die contented
With settling down to blink

The sun we keep our eyes on,
That bow their heads too far
To face their own horizon,
On these be war on war.

Cursed by the bonds you sever,
The bondsmen you release,
Go, seek the Land of Fever
And find the Land of Ease.

THE CARAVAN

LIFT up your hearts, ye singers !
We lift them up in song.
Behold, the sunset lingers.
No less shall night be long.
We meet her unaffrighted,
Though never bourne be sighted.
We *meant* to be benighted
Still moving fleet and strong.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Song of
the Selves*

We smooth the stony places
For those that else despond.
We pass, and leave no traces
Save this, a broken frond,
And this, that hands once craven
Take hardship for the haven
Upon whose rocks is graven :
“ The Pilgrims of Beyond.”

XI

THE STORY OF THE SUTLER

AND so the song was finished. Then they called
To Kizzil Bash, the Sutler of Dilman,
“Take up the tale, for you have wandered far
Behind strange masters. . . .” Once, he said, I
served

One of the Roumi lordlings, silver-faced,
Who to forget some sorrow or lost love—
Such is their way—came with an embassy
To cringe before the Caliph in Stamboul
For something sordid, trade. . . . He mouthed our
verse

To please his guests, and I corrected him.
The man was cypress-sad and lone, but he
Could not be silent as the great should be,
Because he neither knew his place nor me.
The boatman marvelled at his lack of dignity.
They knew the currents. He was bent on steering,
And spoke of God in terms wellnigh endearing.
I see him still, sharp beard, black velvet mantle,
ear-ring.

He dug with slaves for Greekling manuscript,
Danced like a slave-girl when he found, and shipped
Westward cracked heads and friezes we had chipped.
I saw him kiss a statue, murmuring eager-lipped :

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Story
of the
Sutler*

“ Fear was born when the woods were young.

Chance had gathered an heap of sods,
Where the slip of a tree-man’s tongue
Throned the dam of the elder gods.

Twilight, a rustled leaf,
Started the first belief
In some unearthly Chief
Latent behind

Cover of aspen shade.
Skirting the haunted glade
Some one found speech, and prayed.

Was it the wind

Sniffing his cavern or the demon’s laughter ?
Here from the night he conjured up Hereafter,
Quarried the river-mists to house the unseen.
Only the woodpecker had found life hollow,
And gods went whither none was fain to follow,
Because the earth was green
And Afterwards was black.

“ Man, the child of a tale of rape,
Drew the seas with his hunting ships,
Cut their prows to a giant’s shape,
Fitted names to their snarling lips :
Gods in his image born,
Singing, fierce-eyed, unshorn,
Lords of a drinking-horn
Five fathoms deep ;
Holding the one reward
Carved by a dripping sword,

THE STORY OF THE SUTLER

Feasts, and above them stored
Ceiling-high sleep.

*The Story
of the
Sutler*

Save to the conqueror Life was put-off Dying,
And Death brought nothing but the irk of lying—
How long—with over-restful hosts abed.
The rough immortals, whom he met unshrinking,
Spared him from nothing but the pain of thinking.
And so the earth was red
While Afterwards was grey.

“ Jungles thinned, and the clearings merged
Where the wandering clans drew breath.
Druids rose and the people surged.
Then the blessing of Nazareth
Fell on them mad and mild,
Boasting itself a child.
Smite it ! And yet it smiled.
There, as it kneeled,
Lowliness rose to might,
Deeming our days a night,
Bodily joy a plight
Soon to be healed ;
Gave to one god all credit for creation,
But, lest the Path should seem the Destination,
Strove to attune man's heartstrings to a rack,
Until the soul was fortified to change hells,
While saints and poets chanted songs of angels,
Confessing earth was black
But Afterwards was gold.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Story
of the
Sutler*

“ Faith was raised to the power of millions,
Went as wine to a single head,
Took its chiefs for the sun’s postillions,
Claimed to speak in its founder’s stead ;
Till in the western skies
Reason’s epiphanies
Beckoned the other-wise
Men to rebirth.
Doubt, that makes spirits lithe,
Woke and began to writhe,
Burst through the osier withe,
Freed the old earth.
Nature cried out again for recognition,
Claiming that flesh is more than mere transition,
That mouths were made for sweeter things than
prayer.
Yea, she, that first revealed the superhuman,
Out of the depths in us shall bring the new man
Who knows that earth is fair,
And Afterwards—who knows ! ”

We knew his childish searching meant no harm,
But his own people somehow took alarm ;
For when his heart was healed, and he returned
With songs, ’tis said that he and they were burned.
Only this one survived. I put it by
Lest one who lived so much should wholly die.
He tried to spend far more than every day,
And never asked what he would have to pay.

THE STORY OF THE SUTLER

To him a pint of music was a potion
That set him dabbling in some small emotion.
Wherever he could drown he marked an ocean
He got no pleasure but the pains he took
To bring himself to death by one small book
Filled with what he had heard, the babble of a brook.

*The Story
of the
Sutler*

XII

THE LEGEND OF THE PEASANT

THEY passed a field of purple *badinjan*.
A peasant raised his head to hear the tune,
And, seeking some excuse for holiday,
He followed humming ballads, this the first :

“ It happened say a century ago,
Somewhere between Mazanderan and Fars,
A Frank was in the picture—that I know—
Mud-walls and roses, cypresses and stars,
White dust and shadows black.

“ It happened She was loved by more than One,
Though no one now recalls the name and rank
Of even One, whose heart was like the stone
That framed the water of the garden tank
Long gone to utter wrack.

“ It happened that one night She had a mind
To roam her garden. Youth was hidden there,
It happened One was watching from behind
A Judas-tree, though neither of the pair
Heard the twigs sigh and crack.

THE LEGEND OF THE PEASANT

*The Legend
of the
Peasant*

“ It happened that next night She wandered out
Once more, and Youth was hiding there again.
And One sprang forth upon them with a shout,
And fanatics and *seyids* in his train
Streamed in a wolfish pack.

“ It happened that the sun found something red
Among the Judas-blossoms where Youth lay
Upon his face ; a crow was on his head,
And desert dogs began to sniff and bay
At something in his back.

“ It happened that none ever knew Her fate—
Except that She was never heard of more—
Save One, and two that through a secret gate—
Perhaps they knew—a struggling burden bore.
I think it was a sack.”

Some one applauded ; then the humming drone
Was stung to louder efforts, and went on :

“ They staggered down the stiff black avenue,
Hiding the sack’s convulsions from the moon,
To drown its cries they feigned the shrill *iouiou*
Of owls, then dropped it in the swift Karûn,
Paused, and admired the view.

“ The ripples took her, trying not to leap,
But, copying the uneventful sky,
Serenely burnished where the stream grows deep
They smoothened their staccato lullaby.
And so she fell asleep

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Legend
of the
Peasant*

“ Where no sharp rock disturbs the river bed,
A moving peace, whose eddies turn half-fain
Towards their youth’s tumultuous watershed,
And slow blank scutcheons widen like a stain
Portending Sound is dead.

“ No herd or village fouls the shining tide,
Till ocean lays a suzerain’s armistice
On brawling tributaries. Like a bride
Greeting her lord it laved her with a kiss,
And left her purified.

“ But the sea-*Jinn*, who dwell and dress in mauve,
And hunt blind monsters down the corridors
Between sunk vessels—fishers know the drove,
Their horns and conches and the quarry’s roars
In autumn—hold that love

“ Should meet with more than pardon. So the pack
Spliced up a wand of all the spillikin spars
Flagged with the purple fantasies of wrack,
Composed a spell not one of them could parse,
And tried it on the sack.

“ ’Twas filled with pearls ! Each *Jinni* dipped his
hand,
And scattered trails through labyrinths of ooze,
Or sowed gems thick upon the golden sand,
Festooned a bed from Bahrein to Ormuz,
Muscat to Ras Naband. . .

THE LEGEND OF THE PEASANT

“ *Hajji*, a deeper meaning than appears
Beneath the surface of my song may lurk
Like *Jinn*. How oft the crown of gathered years,
The dazzling things for which men thank their
Are made by Woman’s tears.” [work,

*The Legend
of the
Peasant*

Tous shook his head and grunted, ceaselessly
The caravan limped onward to the Gulf.

XIII

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

SERDAR-I-JANG, the Wazir of the west,
Of all mankind had served his country best
By weeding it. The terror of his name
Lapped up the barren Pusht-i-kuh like flame,
Till the Shah smiled : “ My other lords of war lose
Battles, but he wrings love from my Baharlus.”

He smote them hip and thigh. The man was brave.
Having four wives, he needs must take for slave
Whatever captive baggage crossed his path,
And never feared love for its aftermath.
Thus fared the Wazir while his locks were blue.
The silver in them found him captive too.

The singing caravan in chorus flowed
Past the clay porticoes of his abode.
She came, he saw, was conquered—like a puppet
Drawn to the window, to the street and up it,
Forth to the desert, leaving in the lurch
His pleasant wars and policies to search

For what ? He knew not. Haply for the truth
Whose home is open eyes, not dreams or youth.

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

But this he dimly knew, that something strange,
Beauty, had come within his vision's range ;
And a new splendour, running through the world,
Drummed at the postern of his senses, hurled

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

Him forth, this warrior proud and taciturn,
Footsore upon a pilgrimage to learn
Humility. . . . These beggars, in whose wake
He toiled, ne'er paused for him to overtake
Their echoes. When at dusk he joined their ring
None rose or bowed. All watched him. Could he
sing ?

And he could not, for never had he thrown
His days away on verse ! He sat alone,
So that his silence stamped him with the badge
Of hanger-on or menial of this *haj*.
Thrust as he would with much unseemly din,
He found no place beside the palanquin,

Till Seyid Rida, scholar of Nejaf,
Took pity on him, saying : " You shall laugh
At these black days when, having served your time,
You share the sovereignty of Persian rhyme.
Be patient, pray to Allah, O my son,
For power of worship. It shall come anon. . . ."

Seyid Rida spoke in vain. The Wazir's place
So far behind the Queen, her perfect face

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

But half-divined, as Sight denied to Faith,
A doubt lest love itself should be a wraith
Dazzling but mocking him, these stirred his passion
To sworn defiance, to his last Circassian

And thoughts of many a woman taken by force,
Restive and then submissive as a horse.
And now. . . . He followed in the wake of vision
Lofty and pure as Elburz snows. Derision
Would follow him in turn ! . . . He shook his fist
Toward the feet his soul would fain have kissed :

“ Oh, I was born for women, women, women.
Through my still boyhood rang the first alarm ;
And since that terror ever fresh invaders
Have occupied and sacked me to their harm.
I am the cockpit where endemic fever
Holds the low country in a broken lease
From waves that ruined dykes appear to welcome.
Only one great emotion spares me—Peace !

“ I have grown up for women, women, women ;
And suffering has had her fill of me.
My ears still echo with receding laughter,
As shells retain the voices of the sea.
I am the gateway only, not the garden,
That opens from a crowded thoroughfare.
I stand ajar to every passing fancy,
And all have knocked, but none have rested there.

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

“ And I shall die for women, women, women,
But not for love of them. Adventure calls
Or waits with old romance to disappoint me
Behind the promise of surrendered walls.
I am the vessel of some mad explorer,
That sails to seek for treasure in strange lands
Without a steersman in a crew of gallants,
And, finding fortune, ends with empty hands.”

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

A deathly silence fell. Green-turbaned men
Fell noiselessly to sharpening their knives
On their bare hardened feet. Seyid Rida sighed :
“ Alas, your heart is set upon reward
For gifts of self. You cannot understand
Love loves for nothing, brother. Those who serve
God the most purely cannot count that He
Will love them in return. . . .”

The Wazir scowled.

But Dreamer-of-the-Age took him aside,
“ I would unfold a story like a carpet.
The camel Tous told it to me last night :

“ King Suleiman’s wives were as jewels, his jewels as
stones of the desert
In number. His concubines herded as desert-gazelles
in their grace,
That answered his bidding as meekly as all his wild
animal kingdom,
The beasts and the birds and the fishes. Yet the
world was as pitch on his face.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

"Now it chanced that the ruler of Saba had news by a
 merchant of peacocks
From this king like a hawk-god of Egypt, whose beak
 was set deep in the gloom
Of his grape-purple beard, and she said : ' We shall
 see how his vanities stead him
When from under the arch of his eyebrows he sees my
 feet enter his room.'

"For her feet were far whiter than manna. Her body
was white as the cry
Of a child when the chords of hosanna draw the beauty
of holiness nigh.
The droop of her eyelids would fan a revolt from
Baghdad to Lake Tsana,
Her fingers were veined alabaster. The sprites of her
escort would sigh,

“ As they bathed her with sun set in amber and cooled
in the snow of a cloudlet,
And taught her chief eunuch to clamber up moon-
beams as fleet as a ghost :
These, lavish of reed-pipe and tamburine, slaves of
the Son of Daoud, let
Her palanquin down into Zeila—gambouge and
magenta, the coast ! ”

And the Wazir cried, "Ha!" to the rhymes.

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

“ Round the harbour a hoopoe was strutting, for *The*
Suleiman’s Seal had appointed *Promotion*
Him messenger-bird, and he thought : ‘ If I bring the *of the*
Soldier
good news of this beauty,
This Sovereign of Silkiness, I shall harvest great
thanks and promotion.’
So he flew to the Presence and twittered a text on the
pleasure of Duty.

“ ‘ Fulfiller of faint Superstition, whose hand rolls the
eyeballs of Thunder,
And lightens forked tongues on a mission of menace
to bat or to eagle !
There comes to your portal a vision whose light shall
make Israel wonder.
Immortal her beauty and mortal her glance that is
soft as a seagull.’ ”

And the Wazir cried, “ Hey ! ” to the rhymes.

“ But Suleiman, sated with women and governance,
lifted his beak
From his beard. Naught escaped the magician, not
a thought, not a tone. Ah, he knew
All ! He said : ‘ I have measured your mind as my
pity has measured my people.
We shall speak of reward when she comes ; I may live
to regret it—and you !

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

“ ‘ Lo, I am the servant of God, whom I serve as you
serve me, not asking
For pay by each day or each act, but just for the
general sum.
The work of the world must be done without wage to
be done to our credit.
We shall profit in claiming our guerdon not by what
we are but become.’ ”

“ So the Queen came to Kuddus. Mashallah ! Shall
a picture be limned of her coming !
Flushed dancers and lutists athrumming light-limbed
as Daoud round the Ark !
Crushed roadway and crowd-applause rumbled, loud
music, hushed barbarous mumming !
To the cry, ‘ On to Sion ’ above her, this lover rode
straight at her mark ! ”

And the Wazir cried, “ Ho ! ” to the rhymes.

“ She had but to flatter the wizard to win him. He
said to the hoopoe :
‘ I will haggle no more. You shall learn to your
cost what the bargainer buys,
Whose faith levies toll upon duty, whose trust will
not serve me on trust,
Or love for Love. On your head be it.’ The hoopoe
said : ‘ *Cheshm*—on my eyes ! ’ ”

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

“ All other birds fainted with envy, as Suleiman lifted *The*
a digit. *Promotion*
Thereon was the Ring-of-most-Magic. Then he spat *of the*
on the dust from his bed, *Soldier*
And the miracle came ! for the hoopoe went swagger-
ing out of the presence
(So he struts in his walking to-day) with a crown of
pure gold on his head.

“ But the Jews thus learnt avarice. Some one spread
news of the bird-coronation
To the ends of the kingdom. The tribes ran out as
one man armed with lime,
Bows, nets, slings—and slew the hoopoes for the sake
of their crowns. There was profit
In sport then ; none other has liked them so well
since King Suleiman’s time.

“ They divided the spoil till in Israel only our
messenger-bird
Survived with two fellows. . . . He fled to Suleiman’s
closet for *bast*,
Sobbing, ‘ Spare us, O king ! Make a sign with the
ring that men sing of ! We fare as
Amalekites. If I have sinned, I am punished. We
three are the last

“ ‘ Of our race. In your grace turn your face to our
case. We place hope in your favour !
My brood is a Yahudi’s food. Israel—who disputes
it—insane

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

For gain. We are slain all day long by the strong
sons of Cain. Let us waive our
Gold bane for plain down, lest we drown in our own
blood ! Discrown us again ! ”

And the Wazir cried, “ Hi ! ” to the rhymes.

“ The King made reply. He was sadder than rain
in the willows of Jordan.
‘ We are God’s passing thoughts. They alone that
await their fulfilment are wise.
You shall be for a warning, O hoopoe. I had given
you more than gold-wages
If you had believed we not only had ears, I and Allah,
but eyes !

“ ‘ Yet giving is fraught with forgiveness. Now
therefore the crown you did covet
Is gone. You are healed of your pride ; you shall
live till the Angel of Death errs
From Allah’s command. By my Ring-of-most-Magic
the gold is transmuted.
Go forth ! He has set for a sign on your brow a tiara
of feathers.’

“ So the hoopoe went forth in the glory of plumes
that he won in this wise
And wears. Then the hunters, assembled from the
uttermost quarters of Sham, should

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

Have shot, but did not, for they said : ‘ What a head ! *The*
We will not waste an arrow *Promotion*
On sport of this sort. We are sold ! We were told *of the*
it was gold and . . . ’ ” *Soldier*

Tamam Shud

And the Wazir shrieked “ Halt ! ” at the rhymes.

But as he slept that night the Dreamer prayed
That understanding might bedew his head.
And so it was. The fountain of the Dawn
Rose in the whiteness of the month *Rajab*,
Washing the desert stones, and made each body
Shine as the sun-swift chariot of a soul.

While the last swimmer in the sea of slumber,
Out of the deep, its jungled bottom, its ghosts,
Its weight and wonders, rises to the surface
In final breaths of sleep, the Wazir stirred
And flung out joyful arms. Not otherwise
The groping diver in the Gulf of Pearls,
Having achieved adventure, comes to light
And grasps the painted gunwale—with his prize.

“ For every hour and day
Of youth that spelled delay
In finding you, I pray
To life for pardon,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

I that long since have faced
My task in patient haste :
Out of my former waste
 To make your garden.

“ With these soiled hands I made
My Self (man’s hardest trade).
The sun was *you* : the shade
 My toil, my seed did.
I drove my strong soul through
Years in the thought of you,
For whom my garden grew,
 And grew unheeded ;

“ For you, an episode
That lay beside your road,
For me, my long abode,
 My will’s whole centre.
Lo now my task fulfilled,
Yet not the hope that thrilled
The stubborn realm I tilled
 For you to enter.

“ Ah, must all sacrifice
Be weighed with balance nice !
To ask the gods our price
 Makes all creeds shoddy.
Then should I bargain now—
Troubling my worship—how
You will reward my vow
 Of soul and body ?

THE PROMOTION OF THE SOLDIER

“ I have not striven in vain,
Though all my poor domain
Cries daily for your reign.

*The
Promotion
of the
Soldier*

I hold its treasure,
A source of splendour, known
Haply to me alone,
A boundless love—my own.

Had you but leisure

“ To pause beside this spring
A moment, harkening
How through my silence sing

The dreams that here rest,
I yet might make you see
Some of the You in Me.

This song not I but we
Have written, dearest.”

Long ropes of stillness joined the caravan
Closer together ; no man spoke a word,
Till Dreamer-of-the-Age : “ Friend, go up higher
At the Queen’s right hand.” Seyid Rida smiled :
“ I knew you would outrun us.” The Wazir
Heard neither fame nor blame, and so was blest
Because he sought praise only of the Queen.

XIV

THE MORAL OF THE SCHOLAR

AT Ispahan the notables were met
In conclave. Seyid Rida, scholar scamp—
As Dawlatshah records—perched in the
porch :

“Round the table sit the sages—
Different views and different ages—
Secretaries scribble pages,
Taking down each ‘er’ and ‘hem,’
Taking down each word they utter
Like the solemn measured sputter
Of fat raindrops from a gutter.
I speak last of them.

“Outside in the summer weather
Birds are talking all together,
While a tiny pecked-out feather
Flutters past the pane.
Dare you own : The work before us
Seems at moments like their chorus,
Just a little more sonorous,
Similar in strain ?

THE MORAL OF THE SCHOLAR

“ Have a care ! The bird that chatters
Is the only bird that matters,
Heedless of the hand that scatters
Grains of sense or chaff
Mid your Barmecides and Cleons.
I have listened here for æons
To these rooster-flights and pæans.
No one heard me laugh.

*The Moral
of the
Scholar*

“ Parrot, jackdaw, jay, and pigeon,
Prose would be the whole religion
Of the Nephelococcygian
State to which you steer.
If the earth remains a youngster
With some waywardness amongst her
Virtues, I should thank the songster
Whom you cannot hear.

“ Tits that swing upon a thistle,
Wrens and chats that pipe and whistle,
Join their notes to our epistle,
Where the bee-fraught lime
Orchestrates the lark's espousal
Not of causes but carousal :
Owl, we hear you charge the ouzel
With a waste of time !

“ Princeling, a fantastic prophet
Tweaks your robe and bids you doff it,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Moral
of the
Scholar*

Offers you escape from Tophet
On the wings of words.
Spread them bravely, fly the town, sell
All you have for this one counsel :
Sing and never mind the groundsel !
Come, we too are birds.”

Thereat the conclave fluttered and flew out,
And I have heard them on the Persian roads,
In half-dead cities. History repeats
Nothing except the rose. But Persians say
This was the last they heard of government.

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

A LAS ! 'Twas time to go—" Conceal the wine,
 The purple and the yellow infidel ! "—
 Rice cooked in saffron, honey-cakes, and *mast*
 With many-coloured *shirini* were all
 Packed up in paunches capon-lined. . . .

The Queen

Sailed through the city, mounted high on Tous,
 Full in the moonlight, purer than the moon,
 Whose beauty, being weighed with hers, the scale
 Sent up to heaven and left the Queen on earth. . . .

Followed quick tumbles to the lambent street,
 Graspings of shoes, and search for garments lost,
 With tunes that mounted all awry as flame
 Draught-blown, short breaths and straggling feet.

The Dreamer

Reddened and drooped his head ; for at the Gate
 Sat a portentous Sheikh, thrice great in girth,
 Ali-el-Kerbelaï, Known-of-Men,
 To whom—he slept all day—his nightly school
 Resorted in the porch. He saw, and shrugged
 His shoulders, rounded in glory like the hills
 That drift and clash about the Gulf of Pearls—

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

Bahreinis tell the tale lest rival *dhow*s
Should venture into trade—and thus held forth :

“ Gossips, I have watched fools wander through
this gate

In generations. Never have I seen
Men so bewitched by one closed palanquin,
So little fain to chatter with the great,
So blind, or single-eyed, they did not see
Ali-el-Kerbelaï, even me.

“ Poor souls ! Dusk swamps our wriggling
thoroughfares
Like trenches ; and I rub my hands to think
How I to-night in coolth shall sleep and drink,
While sunrise takes these vagrants unawares.
Madmen set out each day to beard the sun,
And seventy years ago Your Slave was one.

“ When all the world was young, that is when *I*
Was young, I promised Allah to be wise,
And started on the road of enterprise
That leads towards the snow-capped hills of Why,
Passing my hand across my shaven brow
Heavy with all the lower lore of How.”

Ali-el-Kerbelaï sighed his soul
Out of his nostrils pious and serene,
For the swift curtain of the night had slid
Along the rings of stillness, as he peered

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

Into the plain. The singing caravan
Had dwindled slowly to a speck of white.
Then said the sage : “ Behold they go to nothing,
These lovers, these far-eyed. To think they passed
Within a foot of wisdom and my robe !
Alas, they passed and knew not. ’Tis the risk
Of all such noisy dreamers. Ah, my head
Pities. . . . Well, God is great. And God made me.

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

“ Thus first I reached Mohammerah, whose sheikh
In speechless gratitude besought a boon—
To make me eunuch in his *anderûn*—
For I had talked away his stomach-ache.
And of this epoch I need only say
I had fresh dates for dinner every day.

“ But I was young. I spurned the unmanly job,
For I loved conquest, and the world lay flat
Before me like a purple praying-mat,
And all young women made my heart *kebob*,
Until the sheikh conceived himself disgraced.
Then I took ship from Basra—in some haste.

“ We put to sea, fair sirs, a foul-faced sea
Puckered with viciousness and green with hate
Of all the sons of Adam ; and black fate
Conspired with her to take account of me,
For all the *Jinn* who lurk among the gales
Came down to fecundate our bellied sails.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

“ They blew. They thrust my skull against the sky,
The jade-backed *Jinn* disguised as ocean-swell,
But I saw through them. . . . Down we went to
hell,

Where Iblis tried to teach me blasphemy
In vain. No devil’s wile could make me speak.
Thus I learned self-control. (I was so weak.)

“ We drifted past bare cliff and jungle sedge,
Past spouting loose volcanoes known as whales,
And sirens that blew kisses with their tails,
Till we fell over the horizon’s edge,
Fell sheer three thousand parasangs. And there
I first discovered that the world is square.

“ We were in China, sir. The Home of Yellows,
Soil, porcelain, manuscripts, men. . . . Here I spent
Six weeks in stuffing to my heart’s content
The thought-scraps given to these whoreson fellows
By heaven. My zeal picked all tradition’s locks,
And knowledge opened like a lacquered box

“ Wrought with strange figures. . . . Now I learned
by heart
Eleven score ways of dodging every sin.
So, having sucked the marrow from Peking,
I planned with Allah that I should depart,
And having thus obtained a ruly wind
I shone like lightning through the schools of Hind.

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

“ I shall say little of Hind. Its mouth is wide
With sacred texts and precepts packed in lyrics
For carriage, verse unversed in our empirics.
I grasped all Indian knowledge like a bride
Without a dower, enjoyed and let her go,
Giving God thanks that only Persians *know*.”

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

The singing caravan shrank in a clear
Green sideless tunnel of the firmament.
Ali-el-Kerbelaï paused and watched
Intent, even as by torchlight men spear fish,
While searching flame-reflections brushed and lit
The deep brown-watered caverns of his eyes,
Where dim shapes moved profoundly in the pool.
His listeners watched the sage in ecstasy
Poise, concentrate his massive thought on Nothing,
Heard his *narghilé* bubble like a brain. . . .

“ From Hind to Misr. At Cairo’s El-Azhar,
The flower of Moslem scholarship, I sat
Among the Sunni bastards. As a cat
Watches the sun through eyelids scarce ajar,
From dawn till evening prayer I laboured hard,
Lolling in ambush round the great courtyard

“ To pounce on wingèd words. Athwart the arcade
Midday in golden bars came clanging down
Upon the anvil of each turbaned crown,
And many minds took refuge in my shade.
I was divinely hard to understand,
Talking until my throat was dry as sand.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

“ So to the mosque well—into it they pushed
A dog who disagreed with me—and drew
Relief what time the pigeons ceased to coo
Or rustle round its rainbow-juice. We hushed
Our flights of eloquence when my *rogban*
Sizzled complacent in the frying-pan.

“ Mashallah, what a life ! Yet in this scene
I found a fleck of rust upon my tongue.
Propelled by Fate and my own force of lung,
I flitted with two reverend *Maghrebín*
Whom I had favoured, having learned the trick
Of speaking their foul breed of Arabic.

“ Immortal spirits led us, yea the chief
Afrit, the crown of all the *Afarit*.
We crossed the great Sahara like a street.
My fame allows me licence to be brief.
Enough. Whatever any sceptic says,
I still maintain I spent a year at Fez.

“ Here was a sect that said one God was three.
I plied Moriscos who had tasted two
Beliefs perforce, I even asked a Jew
To make this strange *Tariqah* clear ; but he—
By this judge Christians—he could not explain,
Although his father had been burnt in Spain.

“ Ah, how I studied in that narrow city,
Whose walls are changeless as a Persian law,

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

And full of loopholes. To the seers I saw
Is due the gamut of my human pity.
We stirred the puddles of the human mind
Till none could see the bottom but the blind.

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

“ Now Shaitan tempted me. I fell for once,
A venial sin. . . . I journeyed to Stamboul
To plumb the errors of the *Greegi* school.
'Twas there I read the Stagyrity, a dunce,
The Frankish ruler of theology,
And father of a dunce, Alfarabi.

“ I laid him low and hurried home to indite
A book, the fruit of all my Thought and Travel,
Entitled ‘ Contemplation of the Navel,’
A mystic book. (But first I learned to write.)
Such of our doctors as can read have read it.
But I was bent on even higher credit.

“ I sought a cave whence madmen hunt wild sheep,
And there for thirteen years I held my head,
Until the dupes decided I was dead.
Indeed I spent the better part in sleep,
Lest I should be beguiled from abstract chatter
By lust for this world’s striped and dazzling matter.

“ Night brought me counsel, and a pock-marked
Kurd
Or angels brought me food. Day spared my
dreams

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

That tilled the solitude like slow white teams
Of oxen, till it blossomed, and I heard
The Roc's huge pinions scour the starry cobbles ;
And so I rose above all human squabbles.

“ For me the burning haze made sandhills dance,
Till blushing shadows covered their nude breasts.
The eternal heirs of leisure were my guests,
And feasted on my glory in advance.
Then on an eve among the eves. . . . The End !
My soul sat by me talking as a friend.

“ I bleached my beard, and came to Ispahan.
You know the rest. To Allah's will I bowed
In suffering the plaudits of the crowd,
For all must listen ; those must preach who can.
I stirred the town with fingers raised to bless. . .
And gauged the people by my emptiness.”

The caravan was gone. Its song survived
A little, faint, an echo, not at all.
Then like a magic carpet warmth was drawn
Back into heaven, and left behind a void
Where thin-faced breezes, huddling from the hills,
Sat down to breathe hard tales upon their hands.
And suddenly earth looked her age. Like her
The shapes round Ali-el-Kerbelaï shivered,
Pulling their coloured *abbas* to their ears
And drawing in their feet. At last one spoke :
“ O master, you to whom the world is known,

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE SHEIKH

What is your thought's conclusion, what the sum
Of added knowledge in the tome of You ? ”
And Ali answered weighing out his words :

*The
Conclusions
of the
Sheikh*

“ Sir, I have seen the East and West, great peace,
Great wars, indifferent fates that blessed or cursed
Their builders. I have touched the best and worst
In flesh and thought, have watched flames rise and
cease,
Consoled high hopes, deep passions, men that die
For things beneath the earth, behind the sky,

“ For god or woman. I have counted change
For the Sarraf of Changelessness, have marked
Kings, Wazirs, cursed by sons of dogs that barked
And bit, the uninhabitable range
Of power, where all that climb in others' shoes
Are honoured and unperched like cockatoos.

“ Now having known mankind in hell and bliss
Through thrice a generation, I have formed
From all the problems I besieged or stormed
One firm conviction, only one ! 'Tis this :
The Faith, the Pomp, the Loves, the Lives of men
Outshine the firefly and outcrest the wren.”

He added as he rose : “ But God is great.”
And bent, repassing through the city gate,
Lest he should bump his venerable pate.

XVI

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

BESIDE the Sufis ran a whited wall.
Two cypress-trees peeped over from the
waist,
Stiff, motionless as toys. Among their spires
A lithe voice mounted and leaned down again :

“ Come, for to-night the hills are all white marble
Under a sapphire dome,
Where bats scrawl riddles which the bulbuls garble
For owls to answer. Come.

“ The air is sick of moon-discoloured roses,
The plain stagnates like some
Weird archipelago of garden-closes
And dead, bleached waters. Come.

“ O night of miracles ! Come, let us wander
Over this ghostly sea
To that dark cypress-circled island yonder,
In whose clear centre we

“ Will lie and float in phosphorescent ether.
Thank heaven that night is cool
As day was scorching. Let us watch together
The lovers in the pool.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

“ Look in ! Lie still ! A jewelled ripple spangles
The hand upon her hair ;
While, lying listless on her back, she dangles
A finger in the air.

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

“ How still he is. Your motionless perfection
Absorbs him utterly.
Doubtless you seem to him his love's reflection
Face downwards in the sky,

“ Whence I am hanging, seeing only her face,
As he sees only yours.
Lean down ! And they shall meet us at the surface.
O silent paramours

“ We bring to you, by stealth, while men are
A gift. Let your domain [sleeping,
Have it for ever in its steadfast keeping ;
We shall not come again.

“ We bring our shadows : just the fleeting semblance
Of human love. O might
Your waters hold them for us in remembrance
Of one short summer night !

“ A wondrous night, when two reflections hovered,
Dreaming of love aloud
Here by the pool, until the moon was covered
By an impending cloud ;

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

“ And then they lost each other. Where but lately
The magic mirror shone,
A wider shadow, cruelly, sedately,
Passes . . . and we are gone.”

The Dreamer stayed : “ Who speaks of passing here ?
The river passes, passes to the sea,
Drawing in rills the voices of the earth
To make its voice that merges in the swell.
The river passes and the boatman’s chant
Is swallowed up in distance and the night.
Or is it, friend, the boats alone that pass ?
The river, as I sometimes think, remains.
Even so it is with lovers and with love.
Then sing us something wise where laughter lurks,
As underneath the desert, from the hills
Whence cometh help, the hidden water-course
Chuckles. Upon this thread your garden hangs.
Nay, never shake that cypress head ! We need
Not only sun but cloud and tears to build
Laughter, the rainbow of the inner man.”
But the voice answered, or the cypress sighed :

“ I am the brain of Hitherto.
In darkness I revolve and flash.
Books are the fortune I ran through.
My painted pen-case, yellow hue
And yellow sash

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

“ Were famed from Yezd to Yezdikhast.

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

I taught what space and learned what mud is.

My metaphysics were my past.

Alas, I left my lust till last

Of all my studies.

“ I kept my mind so clear and keen

By grinding guesswork into saws,

You scarce could fit a meal between

The triumphs of my thought-machine,

Its puissant jaws.

“ The process of my intellect,

Mazed by the clapping hands that fed it,

Rolled on. They, founding a new sect

On premises that I had wrecked,

Gave me the credit.

“ And so I used my fame to part

Man from his planks to sink or swim ;

I plumbed his shallows, drew the chart. . . .

Illusions broke the blacksmith's heart.

I envied him

“ Suddenly, and set out to moon

About this garden scholarwise.

One silver laugh, two silken shoon,

To fill my empty *anderûn*

With splendid lies

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

“ I ask of shadows, battering
My bars, and wonder why I ache.
O You who made both cage and wing,
Let me redeem my toilsome spring
By one mistake.”

In the parched road the Dreamer took his lute
And tossed these chords across the battlement :

“ The myrtles of Damascus,
The willows of Gilan,
Have sent the breeze to ask us
If aught but sceptics can
Deny the spirit calling
To flesh—we are the call—
And save themselves from falling
Behind a whited wall.

“ Most pure was Abu Bakr,
And Allah speeds the plough
That furrows young wiseacre
Across an open brow.
Most fair is self-possession—
Give me the open road—
But Solomon in session
Went mad and wrote an ode.

“ All fields of thought are arid,
No earthly soil is rich,
By thirst of knowledge harried
And those ambitions which

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

The heart like Pharaoh's harden
To let no impulse go.
But every yard's a garden
Through which we mystics flow.

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

" I conjure hawthorn blossom
From Bakhtiari vales—
As when one looks across some
Choked channel where the sails
Of anchored vessels jostle—
I tune their rhythmic sway
In hollows where the throstle
Is only dumb by day.

" Red routs of rhododendron,
That slope to Trebizond,
Rapt round the garden's end run
To mask the waste beyond.
There facts are free to wonder
Down pathways like the streak
Of silver pavement under
The palms of Basra creek.

" In charity of jasmin
My poor designs are clad,
As nature cloaked the chasm in
The ramparts of Baghdad,
Where passed the fabled Caliph
With Giafar by night
To mystify the bailiff
At Garden-of-Delight.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

“ The orchard-grave of Omar,
Neglected Nishapur,
Where sprays of petaled foam are,
Sighs through my garden-door
With boughs round whose gnarled stem men
Had never thought to twine
Green tendrils from rich Yemen,
The sunburnt Smyrniot vine.

“ Wild lilies, whose rich red owes
Its undertone to brown,
From Kurd-betented meadows
Break out in every town.
Blind alleys’ bursts of lilac,
Where russet warblers woo,
Are set to cover my lack
Of vocal retinue.

“ The myrtles of Damascus,
The poppies of Shiraz,
Have sent the breeze to ask us
If they are dumb, because
Wisdom and one that had her
To wife still hug the fence,
Where we have left a ladder
To rescue men from sense.”

The cypress swayed. Hard by another voice
Climbed the twin tree, and thus its theme began :

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

“ Young man, Shirín is out of date.

We have to thank the West
That Attar's latest is too late
To waken Interest,
And one of Love's great names, Majnûn,
Is now generic for a loon.

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic.*

“ Our crust is cooling, and the bent
For culture bears its fruit,

As we that weed out sentiment
Likewise outgrow the brute ;
While Providence matures a blend
That pure philosophers commend

“ In logic. Constancy declined
Because we pruned our morals.
Love practises the change of mind
That ethics preach in quarrels. . . .”

There cried the Dreamer : “ Who are you that mock
Exiles in search of that from which they came,
Intent to know themselves and so the Lord
Whose ways are as the number of men's souls ?
By these we compass our escape from Self,
The mirage in the waste through which we pass
Across the bridge Phantasmal to the Real ;
Until, forgetting Self, we see in All
The Loved that leads us to the eternal beauty
Shown in a thousand mirrors yet but one.
These are the Sufi tenets. What of you ? ”
From the first tree the quavering voice replied :

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

“ It is my double, Peder Sag,
The summit of the civilized
Above such heats as woman or flag.
It is my double, Peder Sag,
Who bows the poet to the wag,
The hero to the undersized.
It is my double, Peder Sag,
The summit of the civilized.

“ His mission is to educate
By atrophy, the cure for spasm,
And so to serve the future state.
His mission is to educate
A world of fellowships that hate
One living thing—enthusiasm.
His mission is to educate
By atrophy, the cure for spasm.

“ He dresses us in faultless drab.
His colour-scheme for you is tan,
And, level as a marble slab,
He dresses us in faultless drab.
Him urchins call Abu Kilab :
The Father-of-the-Modern-Man.
He dresses us in faultless drab.
His colour-scheme for you is tan.

“ My double did a deal for truth.
He teaches balance to the Young,
And knows a better thing than youth.
My double did a deal for truth,

THE ARGUMENT OF THE SCEPTIC

His emblem is the wisdom tooth,
A flowery and fruitless tongue.
My double did a deal for truth.
He teaches balance to the Young."

*The
Argument
of the
Sceptic*

Serdar-i-Jang impatient pulled his beard
And growling Tous his bridle : " Let him be
The fool I was, and so mine enemy
From whom I part in peace." Farid Bahadur
Shrugged that : " Our wares are not for such as these."

Once more the Brain : " I might have come with you,
Leaving my gloomy castle in the air,
For, overgrown with tangles, in its flank
Lies hid the thrice-veiled door of happiness ;
Only—my double has mislaid the key."

Seyid Rida laughed and answered : " We have found
it."

The Lover knocked : " 'Tis I ! "

The Loved One made reply :

" There is no room for two

Beyond the Gateway."

In solitude he learned

The Secret ; so returned

Saying : " O Love, 'tis you."

And entered straightway.

A wicket opened gently of itself,
And so a sceptic joined the caravan.

XVII

THE PRIDE OF THE TAILOR

OH, sliding down the desert from Shiraz
The tailor-man from Meshed tore his hose :
A crowning test, a broken man ! “ Ah, was
I born that fate might practise fancy-blows ?

“ The road is rougher than a magnate’s mirth
Toward the humble, long as a bad debt.
I cannot dream of any woman worth
This cloth. To me ’twas dearer than a pet.”

Then Dreamer-of-the-Age cried : “ Bring me thread
Strong as the bridge as they call Pul-i-Katûn !
For Meshed’s champion tailor-man is dead
Unless his wounded pride be succoured soon.”

Launched on the seaward slope the pilgrims went
On to the gulf, and heard, athwart the dim
Night echoing, a sufferer’s lament
And Dreamer-of-the-Age consoling him :

“ The night fits down on the desert, brother ;
We are drawn there-through like a piece of thread.
The steepened sky and the vastness smother
Uneasy sleep in her league-wide bed.

THE PRIDE OF THE TAILOR.

Rocked to and fro with a camel's burden
On broken tracks, that are thin as scars,
We near the Gulf. Have we seen our guerdon ? ”
“ Yea, every night we have seen the stars.”

*The Pride
of the
Tailor*

“ The dust is thick, and our own feet raise it.
Our eyes were clear did our feet but rest.
We give our heart and no sign repays it.
What need we ever a further test !
We drift along with the old dumb neighbour
In the old blind alley we call our goal,
Hope : all that comes of a soul's life-labour.”
“ It was the labour that made the soul.”

“ We stride ahead, but in every village
A brother faints and a weakness falls.
The tribes that till and the tribes that pillage
Are reconciled with the life that palls.
Oh, townsmen tread to a fixed thanksgiving,
But what of us, if these pitying throngs
Should ask the end of our harder living ? ”
“ God knows the answer. They know our songs,

“ The coloured patch on the background, Silence,
The gleaming thought that is Love's to wear
Undimmed through space to a myriad-while hence.
Could the hands be worthy that knew not care
To weave Love's garb ? Though we needs must
suffer,
Shall we sing the worse that we sing in vain ?

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The Pride
of the
Tailor*

Our songs shall rise as the road grows rougher.
In the breathless hills, in the fevered plain,

“ They mount as sparks from the night’s oases,
And fall far short of the idol’s feet.

They are stored by God in his secret places,
The least-lit stars of his darkest street.

Yet ten worlds hence they shall dance, my brother,
To travelling winds. . . . If our songs were worth
One gleam of light to the Way of Another,
We bless the sorrow that gave them birth.”

XVIII

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

SO to the journey's end. The Gulf was there
Steaming and soundless, and the weary feet
Were stayed at last from following the Queen.
The great *dhow* nosed the creek ; slow water lapped
About her burnished ; burnished in her sat
Unmoving bronze, her oarsmen. Then they rose :
“ Hail, Bringers of the Queen ! ” “ Hail, ship ! you
bear
What cargo hence ? ” “ We carry on your charge.”
“ But leave us nothing—nothing in exchange ? ”
“ Only the ancient story of a slave.
There lies a secret buried none too deep.”

Thus the chief rower. This the far-off tale.

I dwelled beside the impulsive Rhone, a child that
loved to be alone.
The forest was my nursery. My happiness was all
my own.

I knew by name each cloud that lowers the sunshine
through in liquid showers.
Deep in the tangled undergrowth I caught the singing
of the flowers.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History Our minstrels sang of rape and arson, all the joys of
of the private wars.
Adventurer

The forest wall was calm and tall. My tutor laughed,
and drank to Mars.

Bald, vulture-like upon its perch, our crag-born castle
seemed to search
The gorge for prey, its shade to still the bells a-twitter
in the church

Where, cheek by jowl with fearsome fowl and gargoyle,
ghostly men, in foul
Incense that tried to stifle me, recited magic formulæ.

At home clanked metal psalm and spur ; but, oh the
woods . . . ! I tried to tame
A wolf-cub that the gardener called Life. He knew.
The preacher came.

I see him yet, his visage wet with hot emotion, tears,
and sweat.
Contorted in the market-place he shrieked that all
must pay a debt

To one Jehovah and His Son, by bursting eastward as
the Hun
Had scourged the West. In unison we all replied
'twere nobly done,

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

For he explained that heaven was gained more featly— *The History*
wrenching Saint Jerome— *of the*
From Palestine than Christendom. That night no *Adventurer*
peasant durst go home.

His words were like a wind that fanned a grass-fire :
God would lend His hand
To purge away the infidel whose breath profaned the
Holy Land.

He showered indulgences, and kissed the brows of
those who would enlist
To take a chance of martyrdom or give the devil's
tail a twist.

He promised we should see the light, that cursèd
Arabs could not fight,
Counted them dead since we were "led by General
Jesus," said the pope.

Moreover we must win and use Christ, His true Cross,
the Widow's cruse,
All talismans that found no scope for miracles among
the Jews.

Upon the walls the veriest dolt and clown, arow like
birds that moult,
Chattered with one accord—or some small priestly
prompting :—"Diex el volt."

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer No wonder that our heartstrings glowed within us
like a smelted lode
Whence Kobolds welded Durandal ; and like one man
we ran or rode

Forth. Were we not enchanted ? This was first
among God's certainties.
Even our steeds were like Shabdíz, the pride of King
Khusraw Parváz.

We saw our path made plain, the hills removed by
faith, whose foaming course
Flooded the continents like flats. We saw the world
made one—by force.

In ecstasy our spirits soared. With beatific face
toward
My cloudland all the crowd shed tears, and vowed to
serve and save the Lord.

But cloudland, seeming to disdain such warmth,
replied with slapping rain.
Conjuring such black augury the monks recited
formulæ.

Besides, lest women, priests and traders should tempt
the appetite of raiders,
The Church proclaimed the Truce of God. Not all
our barons were crusaders.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Those who were frightened not to go sold all they had *The History*
to make a show, *of the*
Land, tool and ware to pay a fare. The panic made *Adventurer*
sly kings its heir.

So much was sold by young and old, by fond,
ambitious, hot and cold,
That steel took sudden silver wings, then flew beyond
the reach of gold.

In such a gust my tender age availed not with the
preaching sage,
For I was born of fighting men ; and one of them
took me for page,

Though I was loth to go, and prayed for mercy and
a little maid
Whose hair was shining sunflower brown. I thought
of all the games we played

All day with hay and idle mowers. She dubbed me
knight in pixy bowers,
Where in the hindering undergrowth I caught the
singing of the flowers,

Ah me, how distant ! . . . I was blest in my young
lord who shared the test,
Being sent upon this pilgrimage, his snow-white love
still unpossessed.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer He, too, was paler than a ghost, as though already all were lost.
She dreamed of empery for him. He taught me this to show the cost :

*My heart was mine.
Ambition kept it whole.
I gained the world,
And so I lost my soul.*

*Then you were mine,
But only mine in part.
You loved the world,
And so I lost my heart.*

Only my tutor lay abed, calling us savages, and read
His pagan books. The fever would abate, he sneered,
when we were bled.

He chilled me. His head was like a block of ice, so
clear. He tried to shock
Me with his whispered flings that saints and monarchs
came of laughing-stock,

Or boasted some loud organ, Reason, which doctors
had confused with treason,
Looked round lest walls should hear, then wept that
he was one born out of season.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Our preaching-man pronounced a ban upon him, cried *The History*
good riddance : he *of the*
Was like to lead young men astray because he knew *Adventurer*
geography,

(And sciences, as medicine, reduce the value of a
shrine).

My tutor passed for riding gnomes through space
upon a pack of tomes.

But at the water-parting I waved to the castle green
and dun,
A tapestry where liquid sun—or tears—had made the
colours run.

I looked my last on every stone and tree to whom my
face was known.
The warriors smiled and called me child. They had
not understood the Rhone,

Nor that I *loved* the birchwood's skin, the pansy's
face, the sheep-dog's grin,
That sleep with Nature in a field was sweet to me as
mortal sin.

For love so fierce I stole : I gave my summer holidays
to save
Lambs from the butcher, built for them sanctuary at
my wolf-cub's grave.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History I stroked the landscape like a lute. No scentless
of the words, no colours mute,
Adventurer Could paint its music. Henceforth I had only heaven
for substitute.

Sling, crossbow, bludgeon, axe and spud, cilice and
vials of sacred blood,
On such equipment we relied. Our foes were misery
and mud.

Each Norman keep, each Frankish hold, each corner
of the Christian fold
Sent forth its sheep to sound of bells. Our prophets
might have had them tolled.

Prince, abbot, squire, felt the desire of bliss that
swept stews, taverns, farms.
Soft damosels ploughed through the mire with babes
at breast and men-at-arms ;

And, since this journey was the price of entrance into
Paradise,
The gaols belched out their criminals and beggars all
alive with lice.

We took no food, for God is good ; besides we heard
that convents strewed
Converted Hungary for us. We never dared mistrust
His mood.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Heading the mass far up the pass, that led us straight *The History*
to Calvary, *of the*
The preaching-man upon an ass recited magic *Adventurer*
formulæ.

Soon we were joined by northern lords; no few
among their folk had swords.
(Walter the Pennyless his rout had gone before and
died in hordes,

While Gotschalk's dupes, with geese and goats upon
their flags, had found the boats
To pass beyond the Bosphorus, where Kilidj Arslan
cut their throats.)

Our force could not await the Turk, but in its ardour
got to work
That was not mentioned in the breves. It murdered
all the Jews in Treves.

And I was sad a Christian lad should march with
myrmidons so mad.
They made our Holy War appear too near a Musulman
Jehad.

We plodded on for many weeks through mazes where
the Austrian ekes
A bare existence on the slips of alp below the granite
peaks,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History And all those weeks did naught betide us palmers
of the save that many died.
Adventurer Our gaol-birds eyed the preaching-man, and scholars
spoke of vaticide ;

But I was happy when our stout commander sent me
on to scout.
I cried for little Sunflower-tress, and made strange
faces at the trout.

Because I was a fighting-man I trained myself to
nettle-stings,
And copied oaths and made up things my tutor would
have tried to scan :

*Briar and bramble,
Don't be so dense.
You scratch and you scramble
Like things without sense.
Why grudge me a ramble ?
You can't want my hose,
White-coated bramble,
Pink briar-rose.*

*Bramble and briar,
Leave me alone.
Cling to the friar,
Make him your own.*

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

*Kiss him, the liar
Who brought us all here,
Gentle sweet-briar,
Bramble my dear.*

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

Thus through the months of slapping rain we plunged
 into the Hungarian plain,
And paid its mounted bowmen dear for wretched
 stocks of fruit and grain,

Or shelter in a reed-built town. They asked for
hostages. We gave
Our leaders to these dirty-brown mongrels, who
brought us to the Save

With loss. My tutor's Damocles perhaps had lived
in times like these ;
For whoso straggled from the main body was never
seen again.

Ere this my rhyme had spread, and swelled into a
marching-song. I blushed
To witness how the spearmen held their sides with
laughter, as they yelled

“Bramble and briar.” ’Twas the first faint mutiny.
These men of Gaul
Bantered the sterner pilgrims so I wondered why they
came at all.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer Yea, often now that I am old and hear how zealous
scribes have told
The zeal that made the first crusade, well—history is
eaten cold.

My lord could think of nothing but the lady who had
bidden him cut
His way to her by such detours. Aye, this was true
romance—the slut.

We called her secretly The Burr—whereof was plenty
in our beds—
For night by night he crooned of her, nor even named
the Sepulchre :

*I waited, and the hours were loth to close.
They scarcely stirred till evening leapt to sight
Between the shadows that all substance throws
As bridges for its passage to the night.*

*You never came. Life dozes at the touch
Of those not wholly resolute to live,
Who let themselves mistrust her overmuch
To take the only thing she has to give.*

Amid the rags there caracoled fop-penitents whose
panders lolled
With human baggage in the rear, and hound and
hawk. So chaos rolled

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Adown the Danube rolling east. Beyond Semlin the *The History*
pinewoods filled *of the*
With Celt and Saxon, man and beast inspired to leave *Adventurer*
the west untilled.

The locust-swarms were better drilled than we, the
owls were not so blind.
At every stage we left behind poor simpletons that
moaned and shrilled,

Thinking each swamp Gethsemane. It seemed that
at their agony
The doctors scoffed with cross aloft, reciting magic
formulae.

Alone the princes lightly pranced, as if the pilgrimage
enhanced
Their right to weigh upon the world thereafter. So
the doom advanced

To dervish cries and jester's japes. Hermit and boor
and jackanapes,
I and my ghost-pale master threw a trail of shadows,
motley shapes,

Where Rhodopé's wine-purples mix snow with the
moonlight. Oh, 'twas gall
Amid the horror of it all that Bulgars thought us
lunatics,

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History Or worse ; for ever at our flank a stream, that in my
of the nostrils stank,
Adventurer Seethed ; and amid the best of her the scum of
Europe wenched and drank.

At last we halted where Constantinople's grandeur
puts to scorn
The villaged west, and challenges the Orient on her
Golden Horn.

Ah, brazen, were your heart as strong as looked your
square-chinned ramparts. . . . Long
We waited at the gates in dust knee-deep. The
Emperor did not trust

The help that he had craved. He swore he had not
asked so many . . . more
Would ruin him. . . . He let the heat suck out our
strength at every pore.

But we were told great noblemen, Godfrey of Bouillon
in Ardennes,
Robert of Flanders, " Sword and Lance of Christians,"
all the flower of France

Were on our side, Hugh Vermandois, Stephen of
Chartres and Troyes and Blois,
Baldwin and Raymond of Toulouse. The preacher
said we could not lose.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Moreover he had spoken with angel-reserves behind *The History*
us, sith *of the*
They sent assurance (Saracens we mocked, but had *Adventurer*
our own *Hadith*)

That we should root the heathen out, and blight as
with a ten years' drought
Their fields. Jehovah willed that we should leave
no seed of theirs to sprout.

Our mates streamed in from lands beyond the
Adriatic, Bohemond
With Tancred; strait Dalmatian bays, Epirus,
Scodra, devious ways

Bore them with boastful tales of sport and plunder,
and a vague report
That this was nothing to the spoil that beckoned from
the Moslem court.

Henceforth impatient ups and downs possessed us.
Asiatic towns
Flamed to the general vision. We heard less perhaps
of heavenly crowns

Than flowers and peacocks made of gems, the Caliph's
crusted diadems
That crushed the head like Guthlac's bell, and trees
with solid emerald stems.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer And I confess Christ counted less to us than tales of
leash and gess,
Or Hárún-el-Rashíd's largesse that sent the clock to
Charlemagne.

We practised sums, and tried to train our cavalry in
loss and gain.
Upon the misty wizard-world rose like a star the
money-brain.

Even monks planned theft of saintly scalps ; stray
 hairs and chips of nail and chine,
Divinely shielded through the Alps, would make the
 fortune of the Rhine.

I often tried to hide myself from this besetting spook
of pelf.
In olive-groves I called in vain to simple faun and
acorn-elf.

I pictured kine that kissed their own reflections on
the impulsive Rhone,
A little maid with sunflower hair, a nest we found . . .
the birds had flown.

I think Alexius was wise to keep us out. Our hungry
 eyes
 Fixed on his capital. Why go farther when here
 were rich supplies ?

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

The Pope that cursed our tastes had laid the hand of *The History*
blessing on this raid. *of the*
Blest chance indeed—as though a man should drink *Adventurer*
his fill and then be paid !

Each set to whet his falchion-pet that only friends had
tasted yet.
We dressed our hopes in purple silk, wallowed in
dreamland's wine and milk.

Yet more than any Sultan's spoil fair women should
repay our toil.
Already some were filled with thoughts that our red
cross was meant to foil.

The notion twinged us. We compared our prospects
with the way we fared
On these lean suburbs and the flats about Barbyses.
We were snared !

The very Greeks, whose prayers had lured us into this
adventure, lodged
Their saviours in a baited trap. Lord, how these
foxes turned and dodged.

There lay our army like a log ; our camp, our tenets,
turned to bog.
We sank. Disorder brought disease that stalked us
spectral through the fog.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer The Greeks we came to bolster up against their
weakness filled our cup
With turpitude; the Byzantine put Circe's poison
in our wine.

Our aspirations all became mean as our hosts ; the
inner flame
Went out. From many a starting-point we found a
common ground in shame ;

For here no soul can keep its health, but cat-like
honour creeps by stealth
Down side streets where the children breathe an
atmosphere of rotting wealth.

Between our fellow-churches rose the hate that
 heaven had meant for foes. . . .
The infidel might well have laughed. Perhaps he
 did. We came to blows.

And I was sad that Christians had nothing in common,
 Blood, that our highest dizziest heads could all
 divide but none could add.

But when spring lit the Judas-trees our chieftains
kissed the Emperor's knees.
We crossed to Asia sick at heart. Alexius kept us
well apart,

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Shuffling us o'er the Bosphorus. The number and *The History*
the rank of us *of the*
Exceeded those who went to Troy for Helen the *Adventurer*
Adulterous.

On the Bithynian plain our force drew up: an
hundred thousand horse
With foot and monks and womankind in crowds that
none can call to mind.

Fear stuffed the empty space ahead with devils and
the shapes of dread
That decked our church. A ghastly rush of loneliness
made every head

Feel like a pinpoint. Discontent ran through the
score of nations blent
In cries. Their ribald spokesman forced a drunkard's
way to Godfrey's tent :

*You that have led us through the many tests
Of Hungary, King Caloman, and Thrace,
Who think of kingdoms as of palimpsests
And human nature as a carapace,
Go up and prosper in your lofty chase !
We cannot live on barren mountain-crests.
Our wildest dreams are prisoners that pace
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*Here lies the stronghold that our zeal invests,
This infidel alone we long to face.
This hollow, where our constant fancy nests,
Is more to us than pedestal and dais.
Nay, we will go no farther in the race
For gain, respond no more to mean behests.
We know our cause, and reverently embrace
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

*It is our holy land, and we, the guests
Of passion, brand all other hosts as base.
The bees have led us to their treasure-chests,
A foxglove-sceptre and an hyacinth-mace,
The meadow's fleeting broidery and lace.
Their heaven like ours is nigh to vulgar jests.
A blossom's goal and glory is to grace
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

*Prince, be content and choose your resting-place,
Ere we be all forgotten with our quests,
And this thin earth go crumbling into space,
The little space between a woman's breasts.*

Thereat was scandal, and a priest exclaimed that man
was half a beast.
I could have told him that before. Man was the half
I like the least.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer I blamed the foeman for my thirst, for sandstorm,
flies, heat, scurvy—cursed

Them. Piles of grievance fumed until the red fire
kindled. Madness burst

All bounds, and capered in the glare that wrapped us
round like Nessus' shirt.

Each day 'twas there with yards to spare, and would
not tear. How blue can hurt !

In my delirium I smelt a mirage, heard the swallows
skim

Above the reeds where angels knelt with envious eyes
to watch me swim.

The preacher said Jehovah's cloud and pillar would
go with us. Yea,

The sky was on our heads alway. The sun rose up
and cried aloud,

And stood immobilized at noon. We wondered if at
Ajalon

The Jews thanked Joshua for the boon of this divine
phenomenon.

We came to Nice and formed a siege with tortoise,
belfry, catapult,

And curse that brought even less result. Each
lordling quarrelled with his liege,

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Layman with priest, until the place surrendered, and *The History*
again we lurched *of the*
Forward. I heard our name was made. I only saw *Adventurer*
how it was smirched.

My master clasped a small, soiled glove, and promised
deeds for love's sweet sake
That took my breath, as though his death would
please The Burr. I lay awake

All night afraid to cry for fright. I tried my best to
be full-grown,
A child now loth to be alone. My misery was all my
own.

I well recall our knights' first charge. It was as
though a loaded barge
Should seek to crush a dancing skiff. The foe was
small, the plain was large.

Our men returned with horses spent. It seemed the
Turkish cowards meant
To harry, not oppose. Sometimes we caught them
full, and down they went.

Strange that within so short a space I felt the strong
effects of grace !
The preaching man upon his ass called it a miracle.
It was.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History I, polishing my master's helmet, also longed to
of the overwhelm
Adventurer The miscreants, to hew in bits the devil and his
earthly realm.

A boy's high spirits, weariness, a heart impulsive as
the Rhone,
The wish to get this business done, the thought of
little Sunflower-tress—

A flower beside The Burr, and "Why, if knights sing
rubbish, should not I?"—
The preaching man's persistence, these stirred me to
action by degrees.

We had our fill at Dorylæum. Our rogues were
Paladins. We won,
And weighed our booty by the ton. That night we
chanted a Te Deum,

A myriad voices in the dark; they rose like one
colossal lark
Ere dawn. My soul flew up with them to see the new
Jerusalem

And spite my tutor. I was mad to be a fighting-man,
would pad
My arms like muscles. So my lord took me to foray.
I was glad.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

I had one thought: my hands were wet. That
 I had one fear: I might forget my master's silly
 battle-cry.

*The History
 of the
 Adventurer*

Belike 'twas well no foe would stand—our cavaliers
were out of hand—
So I was baulked. With scarce a blow we filed across
the wasted land

For leagues, till Baldwin turned aside, and out of
Peradventure carved
His slice, Edessa. We were plied to march on
Antioch half-starved.

For seven months sheer courage toiled to take the
town. Its ramparts foiled
Our engines. Sulkiness sat down within us, and
temptation coiled

Tight round our bodies ; every vice was lurking like
a cockatrice.
Ah, flesh can never quite repel the sinuous things
which thoughts entice.

You honey-coloured Syrian girls, whose voices turned
our knights to thirls,
I looked away and stopped my ears by thinking of the
glossier merles

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer At home. The arm upheld by Hur had not sufficed
him to deter
The dissipation of our force, alas. My lord deceived
The Burr.

'Twas worse when treachery let us in. Blood,
lechery, pillage, fire and din
Burned an impression on my mind: the sexual
ugliness of sin.

Cool Bohemond called Antioch his. Ere we had killed
our mutineers,
We the besiegers were besieged by Kurbugha and his
Amírs.

Alternate famine and carouse brought plague; but
doubtless God allows
Expensive trials of faith that we might learn the
magic formulæ.

We melted, melted; kites were fed upon us, dogs ran
dripping red
From piles of nameless carrion, the race that Europe
might have bred.

Throughout our ranks desertion raged by daily
sermons unassuaged.
The preaching man was first in this "rope-dancing."
Disillusion aged

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

My youth by years. My master stayed. If he had *The History*
erred he promptly paid. *of the*
The pestilence ran after him. Despite the fervour I *Adventurer*
displayed

He died of sores, this prince of tilt, though guarded by
ten hallowed charms,
This subject of all *trouvère*-lilt, lord in an hundred
ladies' arms.

Oh, how I struggled to be brave when the Pope's
legate, grey and grim,
Said simply this beside the grave: "Christ died for
you. You died for Him."

Only his jester seemed to care, and ceased awhile to
swear and daff.
"Who," he repeated in despair, "will pay me for
his epitaph?"

*Poor friend, this alien hungry land
Has closed her lips upon her prey.
The tree is spoiled into her hand;
She sucks the brook's thin veins away.*

*A sterner voice than bade you come
To reap the tears that exiles sow
Has called you to her longer home,
That neither bids nor lets you go.*

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*Seven times you baulked her lawless laws,
And foiled the customs of the year ;
But Death defends the tyrant's cause,
And makes the silent court his lair.*

*The lease of life, that none can own,
Is written on her agent's roll ;
And from the desert and the sown
He takes a harsh and equal toll,*

*High-handed, scorning code or text.
No hope the debtor's gaol unlocks.
A friend appeals ? He is the next
To occupy the narrow box.*

*The witness cowers, pale with fear,
When Death the stalker passes by ;
And only prays he may not hear
That ugly sound—a victim's cry.*

*One weeps ; his eyes are wet as long
As on Death's hand the blood is wet.
He says : " The King can do no wrong ! "
And craves permission to forget.*

*How briefly to an echo clings
The memory of these solemn days,
The thought of those tremendous things
That Death implies but never says.*

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

*An hour ago we laid you down.
The tender, tardy autumn rain
Is dried within the dusty town,
And we are at our rounds again.*

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

With every round our spirits sank in bodies lean and
members lank.
I saw the soul of man, a cave, a wick that smouldered
and smelled rank.

Men's fluid facts may wash the grime from pictures
of a distant time,
But I can paint the truth in one small touch : our
poets ceased to rhyme.

Such was the army's hopelessness. I understood,
who once had seen
Our fading gardener rouse himself to kick and curse
the wolf-cub, Life.

I would not let my feet desert, but oh the woods—
the woods of home
That bent and beckoned in the damp zephyr in vain !
I could not stoop

To play false in an enterprise however mad, if once
begun.
Besides another miracle was wrought in me. I was
in love.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer I was enamoured of dear Christ ; His utter beauty
struck me dumb,
His face alone could compensate for scenes that
almost made me long

For blindness. Yea, to Him I turned from all this
heartache, nightly kissed
His hand with passion. I at least would not betray
the children's Friend.

Haply His strength has always lain in contrast. I
found strength to press
Toward the mark. Not so the host : we could not
kick it to its feet.

Then heaven inspired us to devise a pious fraud—The
Holy Lance.
We hid it in Saint Peter's crypt, and dug it up. The
people wept

With rapture at this talisman, and sang the Psalm
" Let God arise."
Also our chiefs—they knew my zeal—bade me
complete the heartening sign.

White-plumed, white-horsed, with golden shield and
halo, I contrived to appear
On the horizon, waved my sword while Adhémar
proclaimed Saint George.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Our men responded with a shout. Through the five gates they tumbled out, An headlong torrent. In a trice the infidel was put to rout,

And I joined in to hack and prod. Pure Tancred
praised me with a nod.
Ascetic Godfrey even spoke to me : " Lad, you belong
to God."

I won my spurs. They *made* me proud. Before my
sword the wizards bowed,
Though me they washed. In vigil and fast I joined
the perfect order, vowed

To hold my manhood chaste, to gird on might with
right and courtesy,
To speak the truth, and so to be at variance with the
common herd.

Such loftiness a man can feel once in a flash : strong
 arms, clean hands
 That forged us into iron bands to unify the world
 with steel.

But as I left the altar daft with the ambition I had
quaffed—
A word can kill a century—one of my perfect brothers
laughed :

THE SINGING CARAVAN

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*I took the vow of virtue
As others take to vice.
I could not break my heart of you.
Men call that sacrifice.*

*The priests applauded nature.
Poor devil, she was loth
Enough. The love of God and you
Has made me hate you both.*

And I was sad that Christians, clad in robes so dazzling,
were not glad
To keep them spotless from the world, and give the
Virgin all they had.

Yet I was racked by continence of all we rightly rank
as sense.
I hungered for the Sunflower-tress that now my lips
would never press.

I wrenched and wrestled to believe that God had sent
us here to grieve
Our bodies with this fruitlessness, that only fakirs
could achieve

His purpose. Then in blind revolt my soul like an
unbroken colt
Ran round and round an empty field. The hedge was
thick. I could not bolt,

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Though one poor knight on stiffened knee revealed *The History*
beneath his breath to me *of the*
His thoughts on women while the monks recited magic *Adventurer*
formulæ.

I sought for solace in renown. Men watched me
swagger through the town
The youngest knight in Christendom. When women
passed I tried to frown.

A year I suffered in this way before the wreck of our
array
Would undertake the final march. My soul was
saved by movement. May

Was with us, when my tutor closed his wintry Juvenal
and posed
Mid nightingales to quote and kiss the *Pervigilium*
Veneris.

I drove his authors from my head, and read Augustin
hard instead ;
But sap was mounting in my veins and western groves
where finches wed.

To these no sound of sapphire seas, no stunted firs
of Lebanon,
Not Tyrian dyes nor Tripoli's loud yellows deafened.
We ran on

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer Through landmarks famed in Holy Writ, Emmaus,
Bethlehem . . . at last
We saw the walls of Zion lit blood-red by sunset and
the past.

The conquest of another world unfurled beneath our
feet, the land
Of miracle and mystery lay as a bauble in our hand.

Men flung their caps up, feigned a swoon. With
prostrate lines of us the moon
Drew silver circles round the site. A cock crowed—
many hours too soon.

We thought to prise the gates ajar. My tutor wrote
their private Lar
Or else—with Tacitus—their folk designed them for
eternal war.

The moat was wide ; we feebly tried to stop its gape
with pebbles, cried
“ Fall, Jericho ! ” The blessed wall stood firm ; but
Christ was on our side.

The Church had saved Him from His wan repute and
thrust Him in our van,
Bronzed, scarred. Alas, the first crusade had made
Him out a fighting man !

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

He taught the Turks to mock Giaours! . . . sent *The History*
timely Genoese to build *of the*
Wheeled wooden turrets. These we filled brimful. *Adventurer*
Jerusalem was ours.

We entered reverent, barefoot; slew three livelong
nights and mornings through,
Then paused to sing a thanksgiving. We massacred
the morrow too.

And I was glad a Christian lad could boast of some
small suffering *ad*
Majorem Dei gloriam. I only longed to burn Baghdad.

Nay, I can say I never hid to chamber as my fellows
did.
I felt my conscience clear as frost, and touched no
woman—God forbid.

I set my contrite soul apart with mass, procession,
penance, rites
That took me out to see the sights, brushing ecstatic
lanes athwart

The quiddering mob with tears of joy—my tutor's
phrase was *οἱ πολλοί*--
Though few were left. Some Greeks of ours confused
Jerusalem with Troy.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer But most the bestial German louts made even their
hardest allies sick ;
They ran to mutilate the quick and sniff the dead
with joyous snouts.

Shriven, forgiven, we embraced each stone that
Christ had touched, and placed
Such relics under treble guard. One note in our
rejoicings jarred.

It seemed some types of Jewish dog escaped the
flaming synagogue,
And their ingratitude was base. They joined to
form a wailing-place.

I heard them as I roamed among blind alleys dark
and overhung
By one-eyed dens. With whining nose against the
wall the pack gave tongue :

*Behold Thy people, Lord, a race of mourners.
Through this Thy sacred dwelling-place they creep
Like strangers. Hearken, Lord, in holes and corners
We sit alone and weep.*

*For Thy decree, most terrible and holy,
That as the fathers sow the sons shall reap,
For all Thy just affliction of the lowly,
We sit alone and weep.*

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

*For all the glory that is now departed,
For all the stones that Thou hast made an heap,
Yea, for the city of the broken-hearted,
We sit alone and weep.*

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*For all the wealth wherewith Thou hadst endowed her,
For all our shepherds gone astray like sheep,
For all Thy temple's jewels ground to powder,
We sit alone and weep.*

*Because our soul is chastened as with lashes,
Because Thine anger like a stormy deep
Goes over us, in sackcloth and in ashes
We sit alone and weep.*

Nobody gave them heed ; indeed each man was
thinking how to speed
His interests, and if the prey would satisfy ambition
or need.

To honest minds with zeal imbued the Pope's indul-
gence, their own merit
Bestowed some licence to be lewd, and take—their
preachers said “inherit.”

Even I who was in love with Christ, I with the
conscience clean and cold
That hankered not for lands or gold, was wondering
how to clinch my hold

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History On reputation, while our chiefs, before we could
of the consolidate,
Adventurer Rode a great wallop round the State and split it into
petty fiefs.

Their overlords revolted me. Alas, for our brief
unity!
Edessa snarled at Antioch, Jerusalem at Tripoli.

Poor Godfrey, who would not accept a crown where
his Redeemer wore
Thorns, nor be strong where Jesus wept! From the
beginning weakness crept

Into our councils. Worse, we watched the bulk of
our brave lads disperse
Well-pleased. At most we raised the ghost of needful
power to hold their post.

Franks and Provincials, German brutes that bullied
babes and prostitutes,
Lombards and Flemings, made for home with clapping
and the sound of flutes.

It flowed away, the unstable stuff, to whom a cause
was but a noun.
They stood to sea. Thank heaven 'twas rough! My
place was here with my renown.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

They vanished . . . home . . . to Sunflower-tress
 . . . home, where a man may die obscure !
 Far off a carle of Albemarle trolled chanties like a
 Siren's lure.

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*East, are you calling still,
Who tried your strength of will
For naught on brown Ulysses long ago?
We have an island too,
And haul away from you
To cleaner kin that bend a stronger bow.*

*Your caravans string out
On many a golden route
The turbaned Magi's offerings ; but we
Steer forth on loner trails
Through rough wind-scented vales
To England, the oasis of the sea.*

*Child Jesus chose you, East,
Not that He loved us least,
But just because His Father had foreseen
The dear and only Son
Might dwell too long upon
Our swinging greys and many-coloured
green.*

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History So we were left alone. The spring broke out in buds
of the of bickering.
Adventurer Each summer brought contentious fruit. Strife waxed
with every waning king.

And I waxed also, better known, resolved to reap
what I had sown.
My childless manhood fixed my heart. The Holy
Land was all my own.

I grew in grace with man—I hoped with God ; from
Beersheba to Dan
I went about my Father's work. Faith could not
shirk what Faith began.

Sometimes qualms came. I looked askance on Bishop
Daimbert's schemes to enhance
His seat. The native Christians sighed they missed
the Caliph's tolerance.

Not that had hurt me, but the void which love will
make if unemployed.
I spent my strength to keep him quiet, and free the
thoughts that he decoyed,

Till woods and Rhone were out of range. I often
wondered at the change
In nature's child, in me. The formulæ were there.
“God's ways are strange.”

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Yet in my struggle with the powers of darkness I *The History*
recalled the showers *of the*
Of light that fought the undergrowth to catch the *Adventurer*
singing of the flowers.

Time passed, and no one seemed to reck of Zenghi,
the first Atabek,
Though every year we failed to act the Saracens grew
more compact.

In vain I urged that we might fall, so slender was our
human wall,
So numberless the foe beside the Templars and the
Hospital.

The answer was that dyke and fosse were useless
when we had the Cross,
With other relics by the score, to guard against defeat
or loss.

My prophecies of coming ills fell on deaf ears and
weakly wills.
I did my best. You know I did, who saw me peer
beyond the hills

Where Karak like a lighthouse loomed at waves of
sand that never spumed,
The tideless main, an ocean-plain bare, petrified. Its
silence boomed.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History I saw in all that vastitude, the one, the drab, the
of the many-hued,
Adventurer No sign of life, no moving speck ; and yet I knew
that trouble brewed.

I tortured every hour to find material things to prop
behind—
Forgive me, God !—Your earthly realm. The need
was great, for it was blind.

The mathematics of Abul Hassan, three hundred years
at school
In Arabic philosophy, showed that the West was still
a fool.

Nay, gently, call her still a babe. How should she
know that I, the Great,
Had learned from savages to prate of compass and of
astrolabe.

Our miracles were not so sure to heal as Rhazes'
simplest cure.
His friends the moon and stars obeyed the rules that
Abul Wafa made.

My stolen lore raised me above my fellows. Every-
thing but love
Was mine, respect, authority. The jealous Church-
men dared not move.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Our infant realm could not dispense with me, its *The History*
shield and main defence. *of the*
I knew the Damascene recipe for making steel, and *Adventurer*
made it cheap.

My mind was fertile in resorts. I spent the pilgrims'
fees on forts,
And settled, for their skill in trade, Venetian slavers
at our ports.

Howbeit I trembled lest our main enthusiasm should
be for gain.
I stripped myself to work against the working of the
money-brain.

And I was glad I passed for mad and single-eyed as
Galahad.
I sacrificed in saving Christ the profit that I might
have had.

Nothing that I could do availed. My tongue grew
bitter, girded, railed.
My labour only builded Me, but not the kingdom. So
I failed.

Our Viscounts could but show their gums, while from
Aleppo, Hama, Homs,
The foe crept onward like the months, culling our
conquests like ripe plums.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer For all response in Chastel Blanc and towering
Markab-of-the-Sea
Some clerkly knight in red-crossed white recited magic
formulæ ;

Then darkly hinted science, hell and I were leagued,
because their spell
Would not or could not stave the blow that I foresaw.
Edessa fell.

Curse our degenerate Poullains ! The breed had need
of spurs not reins.
To stand an empty sack upright was easier than to
warm their veins

Save with amours. One night I knelt to pray ; but
on the battlement
Hard by a lordling twanged a harp. I smelt the
bastard's eastern scent.

He thought his leman lay behind my casement, where
the jasmin twined
And almost jingled. . . . Oh the woods at home and
whitethroats calling blind !

*Suppose you left that window and came down
To meet me. Do not turn away.
Also you need not frown.
I only say :
“ Suppose.”*

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

*Suppose—you are a woman of resource—
The fastenings of your door undone.
No! They are not. . . . Of course!
But, just for fun,
Suppose.*

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

*Suppose that—safe among the trees below
The terraces—you chanced to find . . .
Impossible! . . . I know,
But never mind.
Suppose.*

*Suppose that—being there—an eager arm
Drew you towards the little dell. . . .
Why redden? Where's the harm?
You might as well
Suppose . . .*

*Suppose that, bending over you, a man
Breathed words of which you knew the gist.
Suppose it! . . . Yes, you can. . . .
No, I insist. . . .
Suppose!*

*Suppose you shut the window? Now? Pray do,
And take a lonely night to learn
This tune shut in with you.
Till I return,
Suppose . . .*

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History Then I peeped out. Some breath divine had made his
of the face, compared with mine,
Adventurer An angel's. Love with all its faults had set there our
Creator's sign.

That shook me. One of us was wrong. Which ? He
or I ? His soul was vexed
Neither by this world nor the next, but floated in a
bubble of song.

It haunted me, as he had said ; it chimed and rhymed
about my bed.
It filled my head with Sunflower-tress ; but she—I
writhed—was old or dead.

Was all my suffering a waste ? Had superstition wed
me chaste
To Its effect ? Was this my Cause ? My tutor in
the dark grimaced.

I saw him snug at home, and how he would have
chuckled at my vow !
Well, who laughs last. . . . I pictured him a dotard
or in hell by now.

I prayed for help all night ; and, warned by lost
Edessa, Baldwin made
Great efforts to placate our God. The answer was
a fresh crusade.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

This was an answer none could doubt. We heard a *The History*
preacher more devout *of the*
Than ours was quartering the west, and pulling true *Adventurer*
believers out.

He hight Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the home of
light and miracles.
The wives and mothers trembled so before his spirit's
tentacles,

They hid their males—in vain. He swept the Emperor
Conrad with him, kept
The collar of his pale adept, emasculated Louis Sept.

He cured King's Evils, raised the dead, he cast out
devils by the gross.
'Twas said he promised us twelve legions of angels.
. . . From the darkest regions

Men flocked to Metz and Ratisbon. News came of
more than half a million,
Not counting those that rode apillion. Our battle
was as good as won.

Such glorious news might well inflame our hopes.
We waited. Nothing came,
Not even light Turcopuli nor Conrad's Golden-footed
Dame.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer Our Poullains first began to whine ; the fainthearts
said the fault was mine.
Saint Bernard was the oracle of Europe, I of Palestine.

And nothing came . . . no troops. . . . The Greek
misled, starved, poisoned, murdered them,
Betrayed them to the Turk, whose bleak deserts went
over them. Week by week

We waited. Nothing. Cadmus saw them cut to
bits, Attalia's maw
Could not be sated with their ruck. King Louis'
mind had just one flaw :

He would not hear of strategy, staked all on super-
natural help.
And nothing came, and nothing came. Our half-bred
curs began to yelp

" Good God, if truly God is good ! " They kissed the
Cross. Gems hid the wood.
Had He forgotten ? Was He deaf ? Could such
things be ? Who understood ?

Not I, though I had kept my word to save the Lamb
by fire and sword.
And after twelve long lustra spent in service this was
my reward.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Louis and Conrad struggled through one day with *The History*
some small retinue. *of the*
I watched. Almost I could foretell what they and *Adventurer*
Providence would do.

And I remember, as we fared, a Sufi—so the sect is
named—
Sat by the road as though he cared no jot for us,
while he declaimed :

*Her home is in the heart of spaciousness,
In the mid-city of ideals. The site
Is harmony, the walls are made of light.
There with the mother-thoughts she stands to bless
The godlike sons sent forth with her caress
To make new worlds. I see them all unite
Into the whole that our most starry flight
Of worship knew far off, and strove to express.
What can we do for her? We run to ask
As restless children for a grown-up task,
While wisdom in the porch, their kind old host,
Smiles at nurse nature, and replies : The most,
The least that we can do for Beauty is
To love for love's sake and serve God for His.*

But Conrad drove his lance in jest right through the
ragamuffin's chest,
Because his creed was not as ours ; and on we rode.
I lost my zest.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer To take Damascus was our plan, relying on a talisman.
I knew that this would not suffice, for I was still a
fighting man.

It ended in repulse and shame. Saint Bernard proved
we were to blame
For want of faith. Ah, some of us had had too much.
We said the same

Of him. At our return thick mobs of women filled
the church with bobs
And bows, poor puppets, trying hard to sing between
their stifled sobs :

*God, whose Son has fathomed sorrow,
Give a mother strength to say :
Mine has faced and found To-morrow.
I will try to face To-day.*

They turned to me. They thought me wise because
I had been led by lies
To blind myself to them ; and now I saw things
through a woman's eyes,

And I went out. Not yet the end. Since innocence
alone could save,
Saints hit on infant infantry, and fifty thousand found
the grave.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

My gorge rose, yet I stopped my ears. I had no hope, *The History*
but I was tarred *of the*
With fame too much to show my fears. My duty lay *Adventurer*
in dying hard.

Oh irony ! That fame increased the more its robes
were patched and pieced.
My whole ambition was fulfilled when power and
confidence had ceased.

The women kissed my feet, my horse ; they clung to
me like my remorse.
I that set out to make the world had made myself
believe by force.

Nay, I that knew we were reprieved at best, had I in
truth believed ?
My youth came back. I seemed to meet my tutor's
sneer in every street.

Fate cursed us with three minor kings, a leper then.
Against these Things
Salah-ad-Din combined the entire orient. I wished
our fate had wings

Instead of feet to end our dumb, keen, futile question-
ings, to numb
The brain that binds us with the chain of kingdom go
and kingdom come.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer One of our knights for plunder's sake undid us, roused
the foe who brake
In through the pass of Banias, cutting our lands in
two like cake.

The hour was here, but not the man. That murderer
Guy de Lusignan
Was sent to head our fight for life. The craven took
for talisman

ME and my hundred years, alas, a relic of the man I
was.
I toiled to still our private feuds. We marched upon
Tiberias,

For none would listen when I urged our leaders to
await attack.
We marched across the waterless inferno. Summer
burnt us black.

The Moslems scorched us with Greek fire. As rain
upon a funeral pyre
Their arrows hissed in sheets upon the smoking scrub.
“Go on !” “Retire !”

Our rabble cried, starting aside like broken bows ;
they tried to hide,
Split, fled for refuge to a hill, did nothing while the
Templars died.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

When all was lost I cut my way out through the
 thicket of the fray,
And galloped for Jerusalem to adjure Guy's Queen to
 stand at bay.

*The History
of the
Adventurer*

In this last desperate passage each proud noble still
 opposed his friend.
 A little while and we were penned, and yet a little
 while a breach

Was made. Jehovah's chosen seat was tottering, but
no Paraclete
Came down to comfort us. I made some sallies.
Then the Queen would treat.

Perhaps in our appeal for ruth my wording stumbled
on the truth,
“One God that went by many names,” or else I knew
Him in my youth,

Or else that Sufi haunted me with something that I
could not see,
Something that only had not been because we would
not let it be.

And when the foe marched in, I own that I was
thinking of the Rhone
Long, long ago, and wondering—a child once more—
if it had grown.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer Yet there remained the sharpest cup to drain : the
moan of us went up,
When from the topmost dome was hurled the Sign
that should have ruled the world.

Down, down it rumbled with our grand designs. All
we had built or planned,
Toiled, bled for, crumbled at a touch, was ruined like
a house of sand.

So soon we pass. The wind knows why. The efforts
of a century,
Three generations' handiwork failed in the twinkling
of an eye.

And I was sad to think that shadows occupy us all.
I had
No hope of earth. What boots a toy that thinks its
maker raving mad ?

My soul had passed through every phase and, counting
forty thousand days,
Was farther off than at the start from comprehending
heaven's ways

Or bowing to them. I came nearest when I pressed
my childish ear
Earthward through briar and bramble bowers to
catch the singing of the flowers.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

The last remains of faith were shaken when I, the *The History*
oracle, was taken. *of the*
My pride was made to sleep in chains. I prayed that *Adventurer*
I might never waken,

But woke. They gave me to a *rais* who wanted cattle,
not advice.
He flogged me down to Damietta. I was old and
fetched no price.

Nathless my battling heart was brave enough to work
me till I dropped.
I passed for twopence to a Copt who sold me as a
galley-slave

To Muscat. In the rhythmic stroke, old, undefeated,
gnarled as oak
I creaked and strained against my fate, until that
Sufi-something broke.

'Twas not my heart. An inner morn put the dark
age in me to scorn,
And in the light I found myself, a child at play with
worlds unborn,

For all that I had thought and read, and fought and
watched the world be led
By any who contrived to cut a knot with that blunt
tool, the head.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer I laughed to think how sparrows might look down
upon our highest flight,
While each succeeding age would have its oracle or
stagyrite,

Would trace the good we never did, the evil that we
never saw,
And out of our blind pyramid extract a stepping-stone
to Law.

Here, where ambition had to cease in servitude, I
tasted peace,
Free of illusion stretched and yawned. A fool would
clamour for release.

I make the rowers' bench a throne to think, and
thought implies Alone,
Of changing woods and endless streams. My happi-
ness is all my own.

And often, when my mates deplore a brother who shall
row no more,
I talk about my wolf-cub, Life. They think I speak
in metaphor.

They gather round me all agog, they think a chronicle
and log
Of Progress lies in withered hands. Their cry is for
an epilogue.

THE HISTORY OF THE ADVENTURER

Has aught been drafted yet ? A blot, an echo void *The History*
and polyglot. *of the*
Each century is written off as preface. Yes, most *Adventurer*
true. . . . Of what ?

My gathered weight had held me bound to find for
every fog a ground,
For every riddle a reply, an end to Being that goes
round.

Now I can say, I do not know if there will be a book
at all,
Or if the deepest chapters go beyond some writing on
the wall,

Though wiser worlds will yet embark, sworn to eclipse
our sorry trades,
Succeed, and leave their little mark : a dynasty of
thought that fades,

Fresh undergrowths of formulæ. Through these no
human eye can see
The open glade—the *last* crusade, in which Jerusalem
might be

The symbol of all peopled space, and Time an emblem
of the day
On which the nations march as one to liberate and
not to slay.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

The History of the Adventurer A story has no finish when it leads to nowhere out of ken ?

O friend, the lack of knowledge brings wisdom within the reach of men ;

For whether hope can ever fit the future matters not a whit.

My duty is to tug my oar—so long as I am chained to it.

XIX

FUSION

IT was fulfilled. The giant *dhow* bestirred
Herself, burst from her slender moorings, ran
Exulting on her course beyond the green
Thin shallows to the deeper violet
Of that great gem wherein the continents
Are flaws. With creaking oars and fluttering sails
The wingèd ghost swept outward. On the prow
Unveiled the Queen stood whiter than the sails,
And save the revelation made no sign ;
And all the sound of singing was brought low.
Then, as the vision vanished in the hushed
Twilight that painted out the caravan,
Leaving the pilgrims but a *burnûs*-blur
On the drab canvas of the shore, a wail
Rose, and to them the Dreamer's last reply :

“ The aimless spindrift mingles with the scats
Where suddenly the desert is the beach.
A low wind whimpers up and down the flats
Seeking some obstacle to lend it speech.

“ The sky bleeds pale as from a mortal wound,
Darkening the waters. To a treble E
Gulls stiffly wheel their nomad escort round
A white sail dwindling in the impassive sea.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Fusion

“ A last beam smites it with a benison.
The lantern twinkles fainter at its mast.
It bears the purpose in me that is gone,
The only thing that cannot be, the past.

“ Let there be night. Shall evensong complain ?
My love was utter. Now I seek no sign.
Mine eyes have seen, and shall not see again.
Out of the deep shall call no voice of mine.

“ Yet I, whose happiness is hidden from view,
Have climbed the hill and touched eternity,
And Pisgah is a memory—of you,
A white sail sinking in the summer sea.”

The ship drove spaceward to the skyline's crater,
The last of day flared vibrant as a cry,
And in the Dreamer Emptiness loomed greater
Than the unrifted pumice of the sky.

He turned to see the friends whose hope had ended
Like his beside the gulf. He was alone.
The singers and the glory that had blended
With meaner notes and lowly, all were gone

Into thin air. But, patient of his tether,
Enduring as the dream he would not break,
Only old Tous remained. As back together
They fared, once more it seemed the camel spake :

FUSION

Fusion

“ Lo, these the fleeting and the true,
The keen to sacrifice and slow,
The plumed, the crawling, all were You
That started hither long ago.
For man is many when begun,
But Love can weave his ends to one.

“ The new, the ancient, song and prose,
The lower road, the higher aim,
The clean, the draggled, dust and snows
Were you the striving, you the same.
Pride and endeavour, love and loss,
The pattern is the threads that cross.

“ Tilth, waste and water, sand and sap,
Tare, thorn and thistle, wine and oil,
Run through *your* Nature like a map,
Are You. The ores that vein the soil
Of time and substance manifold
Await the hour that makes them gold,

“ That found the force of you dispersed
On all adventure save a quest,
And part perhaps was on the worst.
It sent you all upon the best,
Wherein the journey is the goal.
Now leaving you they leave you whole.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Fusion

“ The rabble melts, but more remains :
The golden opportunity
By which the choir in us attains
Not unison but unity.
We feel the sunbeam, not the motes.
The Voice is made of many notes.

“ Slave, merchant, scholar, fighting-man,
The gambling, stumbling, praying kith
We called the Singing Caravan,
Have made their song at least no myth
Not dawn to which yon skylark soared
But earth is his and your reward.

“ The story ends, but not the book.
Sufi, the Queen that you ensued
Led and shall lead you still to look
On peace—it is not solitude.
Through her your warring kingdoms met,
And here is room for no regret.”

So Dreamer-of-the-Age returned
With comfort, all his being fused
At last, and thus at night he mused
Beside the fire that in him burned :

“ Heirs of the beauty yet to be,
Hail, from however far ahead
Or out of sight I hear you tread
The dust that made this tale and me.

FUSION

Fusion

“ Each day shall raise me to rejoice
That lovers such as we must bear
The unbroken chain of life and share
Its thanksgiving. Perhaps my voice

“ Shall be the servant of your mind,
Your linkman waiting in the arch
Of phantom city-gates to march
With you by secret ways. The wind

“ Shall tell me of you, he and I
Be keenly with you, when you go
Forth in my footsteps and the glow
Of movement, steadfast to deny

“ Only the frailer self. My grief
Shall answer your unspoken word
Through blithe interpreters, a bird
Waking, the sounds of rill and leaf.

“ By many a caravanserai
I shall not fail to watch you come,
You of some far millennium,
Who, listening to the bird, will say :

“ ‘ I seem to know that tune of his ;
He sings what all can understand.’
In the clear water dip your hand :
‘ His deepest note was only this.’

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Fusion

“ You shall be glad of me, the shade,
Sighing ‘ O friend.’ And I shall keep
The benediction of your sleep ;
And, when the woods of darkness fade,

“ Shall waken with you, I that had
Love to the full, and praised my lot,
Trusting in truth to be forgot
For worthier verse. Ah, make me glad,

“ You that come after me, and call
From summits that outstrip my hopes.
Yet I shall linger on the slopes
And dwell with those who gave their all.”

XX

LONG LEAVE

I BOW my head, O brother, brother, brother,
But may not grudge you that were All to me.
Should any *one* lament when this our Mother
Mourns for so many sons on land and sea.
God of the love that makes two lives as one
Give also strength to see that England's will be done.

Let it be done, yea, down to the last tittle,
Up to the fullness of all sacrifice.
Our dead feared this alone—to give too little.
Then shall the living murmur at the price ?
The hands withdrawn from ours to grasp the plough
Would suffer only if the furrow faltered now.

Know, fellow-mourners—be our cross too grievous—
That One who sealed our symbol with His blood
Vouchsafed the vision that shall never leave us,
Those humble crosses in the Flanders mud ;
And think there rests all-hallowed in each grave
A life given freely for the world He died to save.

And, ages hence, dim tramping generations
Who never knew and cannot guess our pain—

THE SINGING CARAVAN

Long Leave

Though history count nothing less than nations,
And fame forget where grass has grown again—
Shall yet remember that the world is free.
It is enough. For this is immortality.

I raise my head, O brother, brother, brother.

The organ sobs for triumph to my heart.

What ! Who will think that ransomed earth can smother

Her own great soul, of which you are a part !

The requiem music dies as if it *knew*

The inviolate peace where 'tis already well with you.

EPILOGUE

“ I T’S not as easy as you think,”
The nettled poet sighed.
“ It’s not as good as I could wish,”
The publisher replied.
“ It might,” the kindly critic wrote,
“ Have easily been *worse*.”
“ We will not read it anyhow,”
The public said, “ it’s verse.”

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